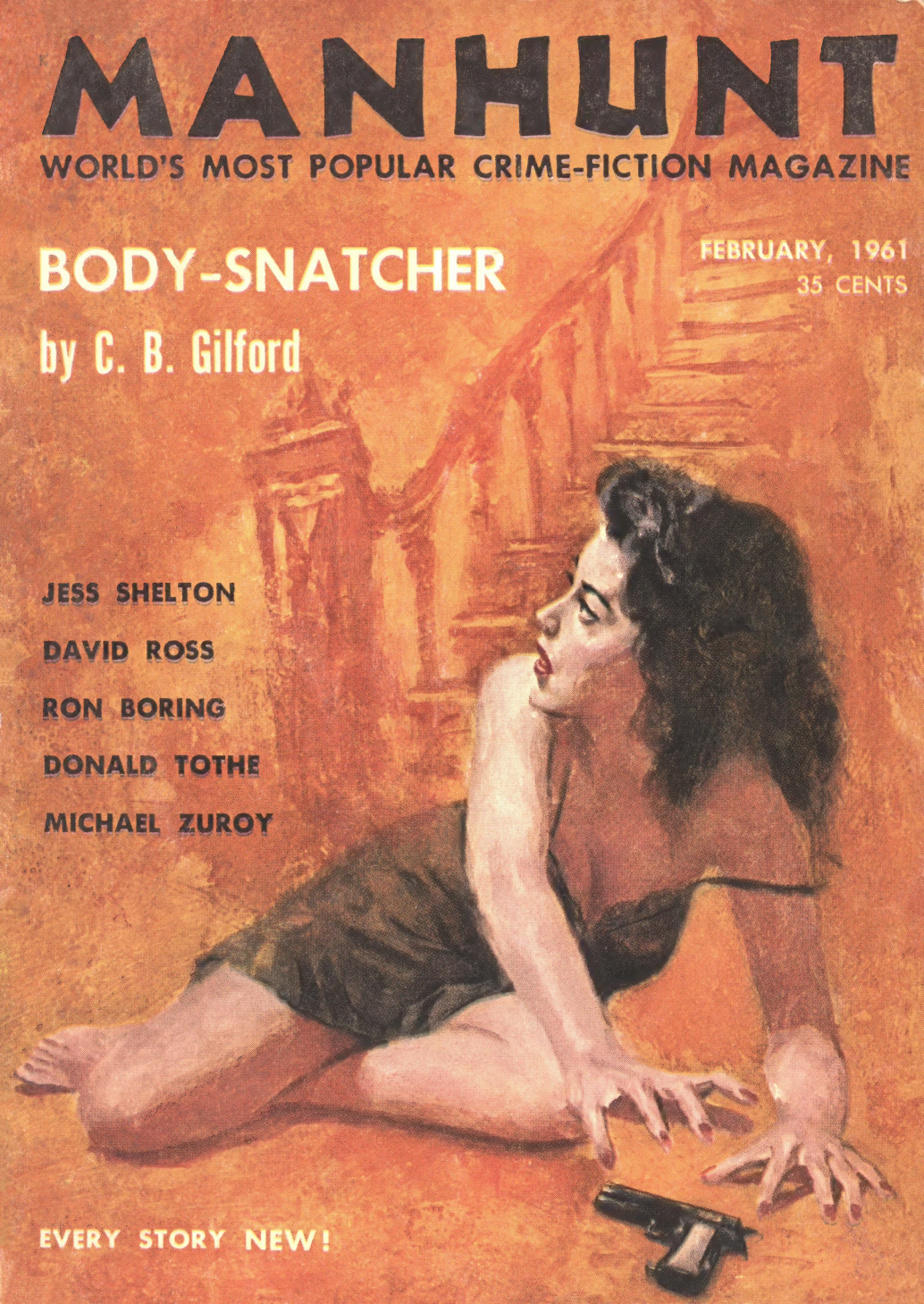
MANHUNT

WORLD'S MOST POPULAR CRIME-FICTION MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY, 1961
35 CENTS

BODY-SNATCHER
by C. B. Gilford

JESS SHELTON
DAVID ROSS
RON BORING
DONALD TOTHE
MICHAEL ZUROY



EVERY STORY NEW!

VOL. 9, NO. 1 **MANHUNT** FEBRUARY, 1961

CONTENTS

NOVELETTES

PLEASE FIND MY SISTERS! *by David H. Ross* 10

THE MASTER MIND *by Walter Monaghan* 87

SPECIAL FEATURE

IT'S THE LAW *collected by Floyd Hurl* 80

SHORT STORIES

HOLD-UP *by Jess Shelton* 1

LAST PAYMENT *by Ron Boring* 39

VENGEANCE *by Robert Page Jones* 44

BODY-SNATCHER *by C. B. Gilford* 54

HOW MUCH TO KILL? *by Michael Zuroy* 68

THE ALARMIST *by Donald Tothe* 81

MICHAEL ST. JOHN, *Publisher*

GERALD ADAMS, *Art Director* JOHN UNDERWOOD, *Editor*

JOE SHORE, *Advertising Rep.* J. PROSKE, *Associate Editor*

MANHUNT VOLUME 9, NUMBER 1, February, 1961. Single copies 35 cents. Subscriptions, $4.00 for 12 issues in the United States and Possessions; elsewhere $5.00 (in U. S. Funds) for 12 issues. Published bi-monthly by Flying Eagle Publications, Inc., 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y. Telephone MU 7-6623. Second Class Postage paid at Concord, N. H. and at additional mailing offices. The entire contents of this issue are copyright 1961 by Flying Eagle Publications, Inc., under the International Copyright Convention. All rights reserved under Inter-American Copyright Convention. Title registered U. S. Pat. Office. Reproduction or use without express permission, of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Postage must accompany manuscripts and drawings if return is desired, but no responsibility will be assumed for unsolicited materials. Manuscripts and art work should be sent to Manhunt, 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons and/or institutions appearing in this magazine and those of any living or dead person or institution is intended and any similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. Printed in U. S. A.

HOLD-UP

He saw a young man with a brown paper bag in one hand and a gleaming switchblade in the other burst through the liquor store door and dash down the street. He gave chase and discovered there was more to this hold-up than met the eye.

BY JESS SHELTON

I SEEN this kid running from the liquor store with a open knife in his hand, a switchblade, I think, and in his other hand a brown paper bag, and the guy from the liquor store was yelling but the kid took off down Laclede, where it was dark, down toward Weirdville. So I went after him. I don't know why I did. Maybe it was some kind of compulsion like the headshrinkers talk about, or something else, who knows? But when I seen the kid running like that, all I could think of doing was to run after him. I didn't even think right then about being a hero or nothing like that, like bringing back the money, just running.

The guy from the liquor store ran to the corner and stopped, and yelled at me, "Mister, it ain't worth

it! Don't get cut for nothing!"

I heard him but kept on running. The kid, about twenty, tall with greasy wavy hair, a beat blue shirt and faded jeans and tennis shoes, ducked between two rickety buildings halfway down the block. Just before he disappeared he glanced back, his yellow eyes narrowing when he looked at me. I cut into the dark passageway right after him and trotted along the broken cement walk between the old buildings, my shoes clumping with a crazy racket.

Suddenly somebody squawked. I crashed into two hot bodies. Two teenage kids necking. I grabbed the boy. "Who is he?" I gasped.

"You a cop?"

"Who is he?"

"I ain't telling no cop."

"I ain't a cop."

"You chasing him?"

"What his name? Where'd he go?"

"Sammy," said the girl. She was breathing hot. She pulled her boy friend away from me, stood between us pointing her pert chin sarcastically toward my face. "Sammy Barlow. Maple and Twenty-Third."

"Damn you!" boyfriend hissed, I don't know if it was at her or me.

But I took off again, through a cluttered backyard, past an open garbage can from which a profusion of rats scurried, and to the alley. He wouldn't go back up toward Grand Avenue, because he'd come out on the street just half a block from the liquor store, and by now there'd be cops around. He went east down the alley, or else he went straight through the other yards up to West Pine. Then I heard some kids roar with laughing far down at the end of the block, so I started running down the alley. There was a juke joint there, a half dozen guys standing around in front of it, all of them laughing under the red and yellow neon lights with the green bugs and the white moths flurrying over their heads in the hot summer night.

"Hey, boy, you racin' somebody?" one of them shouted to me. They all giggled.

Another one said, "There's a man with a cause!"

"Sammy Barlow," I panted. "He came past here. Where'd he go?"

"Hoydehoy! What makes Sammy run? Hey, maybe he's takin his lunch home to Mama!"

"He robbed a store!"

One of the bigger kids walked over to me and put his face close to mine. His eyes were yellow fire. "Smart man, he don't rob nothin, hear that?"

"He robbed it," I growled back. "I seen him run out with a knife in his hand and a bag in the other."

"A bag?" somebody giggled. "Man, he was takin his girl friend for a walk!"

"Cut it out!" Their laughing infuriated me. "I can call a cop if you

want it that way!"

"Call a cop?" said the bird with his face close to mine. He put a big hand on my shoulder. He was strong. "Why don't you just take your problem to Sammy, man?"

I jerked away from him. "Maybe I'll do just that!" I spat back. "I know where he lives!"

"Hey, cat, you do? You birds, hear that? Pussycat here knows!" The kid grabbed me again when I started away, raised the palm of his hand, ducked histrionically when I started to throw a swing at him, and said, "Pussycat, you don't got to go to Sammy's house!"

"Why not?" I demanded, ready to swing.

"Cause I'm here, Mister." The voice was basso, practically right behind me.

I spun about. He was leaning against the wall of the juke joint, on the alley side. In one hand he held the paper bag. In the other hand was the switchblade, the long blade scattering reflections from the red and yellow neon sign up above. Sammy wasn't more than twenty, a clean looking kid, with good features now crossed up by a mixture of frown and grin. I don't know why, but I liked him sort of, even if he did have the bag of money in one hand and the glittering knife in the other.

"Give me the money, Sammy,'" I told him.

Somebody in the crowd laughed, but stopped when Sammy looked past me at whoever it was. Sammy said, "Man, you ain't a cop. You'd have a gun out by now if you was."

"I seen you come from the liquor store," I said. "I'll take the money back."

"Sure you will, Pussycat."

"I mean it."

"Hey," somebody giggled. "Pussycat's a hero. Sure ain't no cop."

"No, man. Cops ain't heroes like pussycat."

"Old Pussycat, he just chases little birds, don't he?"

I was still looking at Sammy. "I want the money," I said.

He grinned again. "Pussycat, that'd hurt lots of people's feelings. You don't want to go hurt people's feelings, do you?"

"Hey, Pussycat," the big boy who had faced me before said. "How come you run after him?"

"I just seen it and I run, that's all."

"Just run? Just take off like a hero every time some cat runs down a alley?'

"Go to hell," I told him. I heard a shuffling of feet, the kids moving in a circle around me. I said to Sammy, "Give me the bag. I'll take it back to the guy at the liquor store, and nobody'll know. Lots of kids like you do stupid things sometimes, but once that guy gets his money back, you can forget it."

The others laughed, but Sammy's face became serious, his eyes troubled. "Man," he said quietly, "you was crazy to come running

after me. You don't know, Mister."

"Give me the money," I said. "I'll forget your name."

Sammy's eyes narrowed and he shouted "No!" at somebody behind me just a second before one solid fist smashed into the back of my head. All I could think of was that he tried to stop it, and that nobody had put a knife in me. Then I spun down to the cement of the alley.

I woke up more than an hour later. For a while after I started to hear sounds and opened my eyes and could see where I was, I lay on the concrete, my head feeling like somebody had used a battering ram on it to knock out half my brains. I pushed myself up to a sitting position and asked: What brains? I couldn't have been more stupid if I'd stood on my head in the middle of the streetcar tracks on Grand Avenue. Running after some punk who robbed a liquor store, stupid! Dumb! Kids are robbing liquor stores and grocery markets every day in St. Louis, but I had to play hero. Like I was a cop or something. Stupid!

I groaned for a little while before I got to my feet, and when I stood up I had to shake my head and rub my face with my hands to keep from getting dizzy. I staggered back for a few steps until I could walk straight, and went out on the street by the juke joint. The red and yellow neon lights were still flashing, the green bugs and white moths were still fluttering about, and the kids inside were having a real gay time. But out on the street was nothing and nobody. I pushed open the screen door of the juke joint, stood there wobbly for a minute with all the cats and broads staring at me, and went to the bar.

"Gin and beer," I said to the fat bartender. He had bloodshot frog eyes in a sweat shining face. He nodded dumbly, brought me the gin and beer, and stood looking at me even after I paid him. "What you got to stare at?" I demanded.

"You lay off them boys," he said.

"What boys?"

"You know what boys, smart man. Just lay off."

"They clobbered me. Who's to lay off?"

He stared at me with his bloodshot frog eyes. "They was put up to it, man. You lay off."

Gulping down the rest of my beer, I shoved the glass across the bar at him and got out of the place. When I slammed the door behind me the kids all started talking again. The street was still empty. Sammy lived at Maple and Twenty-Third, if I could believe what the little broad had told me in the alley. I started to walk up toward West Pine, but when I got to the corner I stopped. I thought for a change. Already, for no reason, I had run after a guy and wound up getting my head boomeranged. Why try again?

Sammy was a good enough kid.

I could remember his face. And he didn't want the other punks to pound me, but they did it before he could stop them. Still, it wasn't my concern. I turned and walked up West Pine to Grand Avenue, wondering all the time: What did Sammy mean when he said I didn't know? What did the bartender mean when he said they were put up to it? Talk? Coverup? You could always count on one kid covering up for another one, I guess.

I looked at the sign on the front of the liquor store before I went inside. It said: Kelly's Liquor. Inside was a guy behind the counter, bald-headed, what hair he had left was a cross between gray and red. He had a big nose and little pig eyes set close together. He was serving a broad about forty, who was buying a carton of cokes and two boxes of snuff. I knew what they did with it. They dumped a half box of snuff into a bottle of coke, shook it up, and drank it. They said it gave them kicks. Who knows.

When the broad left, the guy looked at me. I said, "You Kelly?"

"Kelly Burke," he said.

"Maybe you don't remember me. It was only a couple of hours ago."

"Sure!" he said, putting on a false grin. "You was the guy run after that punk stuck me up!" He squinted his pig eyes. "Looks like you lost him. How's about me giving you a sawbuck for your trouble?" He pressed a key on the green brass cash register, the machine rang, and he held a sawbuck out toward me.

I shook my head and glanced around. "The cops gone now?"

"They was here and left. Happens too often to guys like me who're close to rough neighborhoods." He forced another one of his grins. "Hazards of the business, I guess. Come on, take the money."

"No, thanks." There was something about this creep that made even his money seem distasteful. "I just came to tell you something. The kid's name. Sammy Barlow. He lives over on Twenty-Third and Maple."

Kelly pursed his lips and nodded silently, his eyes dropping as he replaced the sawbuck in the cash register. "That helps one hell of a lot. Thanks again. Say . . ."

"Yeah?"

"Can I get your name and address? You know how the cops and insurance companies are." He grinned. "Anybody seen what happened, they want to know." I gave him my name and address. He raised his eyebrows and repeated the address: "3245 West Pine? Hey, that ain't a bad neighborhood."

"It's a rooming house," I said.

He stuck his hand over the counter. I shook it queasily. He said, "You sure you won't take that sawbuck?"

I got away fast. The fresh air tasted good, and I couldn't figure

why. Maybe just because I was out, when I shouldn't have been mixed up in it all in the first place. I had a distantly rumbling worry about the mess, but I closed my mind to it as I walked the ten blocks west on West Pine to the place where I lived. I said I had been stupid, got myself knocked in the head for it, but dumped it all right back in the lap of the guy whose business it was. Kelly Burke would phone the cops, they'd pick up Sammy, and that'd be all.

Sammy was a good looking kid. Crazy maybe, pulling armed robbery. Crazy wild bunch he hung around with, what could you expect? Comes running out of a liquor store with a bag of money in his hand and a knife in the other hand, stupid kid, should've put the knife away when he was on the street, and maybe nobody'd know he had a bag full of money. It was too obvious.

I almost fell on my face as I stepped off a high curb. I wasn't watching where I was walking, I was getting so interested in my thoughts.

Obvious . . . about the bag of money. But all I saw was a paper bag. I didn't see any money. Yes, I did. I saw money in Kelly Burke's cash register just a few minutes ago, and now it was only about two and a half hours since it all started. Where could Kelly get a bundle of cash this time of night, when all the banks were closed? And why wasn't he more shook up? Most guys would close up for the night if a kid with a gleaming knife come in and pulled a robbery.

I tried to push it out of my mind again. It was only a couple blocks farther to my house, so I tried to concentrate only on walking, noticing people and cars, not thinking at all. But I couldn't really stop thinking, because I was involved. I would have been involved even if I hadn't stupidly run after Sammy at first, because he was a kid in trouble, and whenever a kid's in trouble, everybody's involved. I noticed a couple kids walking ahead of me, slower than I was walking. Boy and girl, arms around one another's back as they strolled. Good sight. Cattycorner across the street a beat car parked by the curb and shut off its lights. More kids, probably, stopping there for a while to neck. I grinned at myself and was feeling good.

The feeling changed two minutes later when I was going up the sidewalk to the porch of the house where I had a room. Something moved on the lawn and I turned quickly when a thick voice said, "Hi Pussycat."

It was three of the ones who'd been outside the juke joint, one of them the big guy who clobbered me. Three tough kids, and three neat switchblade knives open in the darkness. Then they rushed me, cutting ahead toward the porch, but I spun about and, yelling

at the top of my lungs, ran into the middle of the street, with cars zooming past, and kept running right down the white line in the middle. I heard above the horns honking at me the sounds of their angry voices, glanced back once and saw them heading for the car they had parked on the side street. They'd get me once they were able to get out in the traffic. I kept running, waving my hands over my head and screaming like a lunatic. Then brakes were screeching and some guy hollered at me. The guy in the fifty-three Buick was middle aged, mad, and scared.

"Give me a lift!" I shouted.

"Get in, you nut!"

And I got in, panting, my throat hurting, and he took off. When I looked back there was too much traffic for me to make out the car the kids were driving. "Thanks, Mister," I told him.

"Sure." He glanced suspiciously at me, probably expecting to see a gun. "Where you want out, the nuthouse?"

"Some guys are after me. You going to Kings Highway?"

He grunted. "I'll take you back to the County Home on Arsenal Street if you want," he snickered.

"Just let me off at Kings Highway so I can call the cops."

"OK," he said. "OK, OK."

It took us about four minutes to get out to Kings Highway. He stopped at a red light, I saw a bar, and I jumped out of the Buick and didn't even say thanks. I was sure the kids hadn't seen me, not with the bunch of people on the sidewalk there. When I got inside the bar and ducked into the phone booth I could think again.

Everything made sense. The only creep who knew where I lived was Kelly Burke, so he had to be the guy who tipped off the kids. Otherwise, why would they be waiting for me with knives? All of which meant one thing: the robbery was a phony, and Kelly was in on it. Maybe he was insured. He'd pay the kids to put on the act, ditch his cash for a while, and call the cops but not give a description.

I put a dime in the phone and dialed the eighth precinct. When the tired sergeant's voice answered, I said, "There was a stickup at Kelly's Liquor Store on Grand and Laclede about two hours ago."

"What's your name, Mister?"

"Right?"

"I can't give out police infor—"

"You want to know something about it or not?"

"Go ahead, sir. Where you at now?"

"You got a call about the holdup?"

"OK, Mister, so we got a call. Usual thing. Look, you give me your name and address, and—"

"Did you get a call since then?"

"I can't give out police information, sir."

"OK, I'll give you some. Almost an hour ago I told Kelly the name of the guy who stuck him up."

"Now, ain't that nice. You didn't bother to call us."

"Did Kelly call in again?"

The police sergeant was quiet for a moment. I heard some muffled voices. Then he said, "What was the guy's name, Mister?"

"Then Kelly didn't call?"

"What was the guy's name?"

"Kelly had some guys try to knife me ten minutes ago! Look, officer, my name is—"

A hand reached over my shoulder and pushed down the phone hook, and a voice said, "Pussycat." The tip of a knife was tickling my neck just under my right earlobe.

I turned slowly. Behind the big kid were his two buddies, standing side by side and staring back at the customers in the bar, waiting to see who'd be first to come over and tell them to get out. Nobody moved.

"Come on, Pussycat," said the big guy. "Kelly wants to see you."

They had me right in front of a bunch of people, so it wouldn't do any good even to make noise. They sat me in the back seat of the car, one of them on each side of me while the third one drove.

"Man, that pussycat's a hero," the driver said. The other two laughed.

I said to the big kid, "Look, you're just getting in deeper, letting Kelly use you like that. He makes most of the loot while you guys take all the chances."

The big kid said, "Pussycat's a real good hero."

"He'll turn Sammy over to the police. When the chips are down, he'll—"

"Why, Pussycat?"

I swallowed. "I told them that I told Kelly who robbed the store, but Kelly didn't call in. They'll wonder why."

"Sligo," the big kid hissed at the driver. "You put us off in the alley back of Kelly's, then go get Sammy. You tell that boy to sneak in quiet, hear me?" He pushed his big fist against the side of my face and grinned. "Pussycat, you ain't got much more chance." It wasn't cold, but I shivered anyhow.

From the back room, when the liquor store cleared of customers, the big kid called out to Kelly. The man grinned at me. "Always got to be some buttinski around," he said. He gestured toward the two kids. "Just keep him back here for a while. Later on we'll figure how to make him keep his fat mouth shut."

"The cops been here?" said the big kid.

Kelly grinned. "Early. You know."

Kelly went back out front to the store. The jingle bell on the door rang a moment later. Customers, buying whiskey. A guy getting a pack of cigarettes and making some remark about the hot weath-

er. Quietly the back room door opened and Sammy came in, gave me a sober look and leaned against the partition wall between the store and the back room. The front door opened again. Two men, walking heavily.

"Hello, Kelly."

"What's up, Sergeant?"

"Who's the name of the kid who did it, Kelly?" This from the other officer.

Kelly laughed nervously. "I wish I knew," he said. "I'd nail the little —"

"A guy told you, didn't he, Kelly?"

"Somebody's telling you boys fairy tales."

"OK," said the sergeant. "You better close up and take a ride with us."

"Hey, I'm running a business!"

"You're withholding evidence. Come on."

Kelly's voice dropped. All of us in the back room strained to hear it. He said, "Listen, officers, it's a tough neighborhood. Even if I did know."

"Get your hat, Kelly."

"OK," Kelly whispered. "I was scared to tell, understand?" He was breathing quickly. We heard one of the cops scratch a match and light a cigarette. Kelly said something else, but outside a streetcar was going down Grand Avenue, and we only caught the last couple words: ". . . Maple and Twenty-Third. Look, you guys—"

"Hang around," said the sergeant. The front door tinkled, Kelly waited a minute, and then he hurried to the back room.

"Now, look, kids." He was already putting on a paternal grin. "I had to tell them cops about Sammy, but nobody else! If this character . . ." He saw Sammy then. His mouth hung open.

"Get him!" Sammy yelled when Kelly dashed back toward the partition door. The big kid got Kelly by the back of his collar. I saw two knives slashing through the air and, with all of them screaming and stabbing, I leaped for the alley door, kicked Sligo in the leg before he knew what was happening, and ran yelling around the side of the building.

The two cops were just starting their car. They jumped out and ran at me, but I shouted, "I'm the guy who called! They're all in there now!"

"Hey, you stop!" roared one of the cops. "Hey!"

I was halfway across Grand Avenue, ducking through traffic, with drivers honking and cursing at me, so I didn't look back until I got to the sidewalk. One of the cops was running around back, the other one rushing into the front of the liquor store. The cop inside fired his gun at the floor, hollered something, and the kids came out with their hands on the backs of their heads. Kelly didn't come out. That was enough for me.

PLEASE FIND MY SISTER!

A Novelette

WHEN the clatter of Elsie's typewriter in the reception room ceased abruptly, Al Delaney heaved his six foot frame erect in his chair. A look of expectancy settled on Delaney's face which was hard and tanned with white squint lines around the eyes.

Presently, Elsie's smartly tailored figure slid around the door of his private office. Elsie had a flair for business in her dark, pretty head which never ceased to amaze Delaney.

He watched the relaxed, easy swing of her slim hips as she crossed the room. He grinned, whistling softly to tease her, and

The sister turned out to be a photographer's model whose specialty was poses of a strictly "under-the-counter" variety. Under some pressure, Al Delaney took the job of finding her.

BY DAVID H. ROSS

his gray, level eyes kindled appreciatively.

"Act your age, big boy. We've got a client in the other room," Elsie snapped. She knew only too well what he was thinking.

"He or she?" Delaney asked hopefully.

"She," Elsie snorted, glaring at him.

"What's the pitch?" Delaney leaned back in his chair.

"She's lost a sister in the big city. Wants you to find her."

Delaney grunted and shrugged his shoulders. "What's her name?"

"Blair. Eunice Blair. From Benson, Arizona." Elsie wrinkled her

nose at him and her luscious lips parted in a smile as she turned back to the door.

Delaney was stuffing some papers into his desk when the client entered. Without looking up, he said cheerfully: "Please sit down. Have a chair."

He closed the desk drawer with a flourish and turned, smiling with anticipation. Delaney was shocked.

In his eyes, Eunice Blair was an unattractive little wren of twenty-four or five hiding behind a pair of horn rimmed glasses. She had a thin, pointed nose and thin, pale lips devoid of lipstick and a thin, pointed chin. She wore a frilly white blouse above a black jersey skirt, and her hat made him shudder mentally.

Eunice sat primly on the edge of her chair facing Delaney. She was nervously snapping the catch on a large leather bag while her eyes filled with tears. She worked her mouth wordlessly and dabbed at her nose with a piece of Kleenex.

Delaney thumb-nailed a match and lit a cigarette. He watched her for a moment, then growled: "Cut it out. That won't buy you anything."

Eunice's eyes widened in shocked disbelief. Her mouth flew open, then closed with a snap and she glared at him furiously.

Before she could say anything, Delaney grinned: "That's better. Now, Miss Blair—Eunice—your sister's missing?"

"Yes—!" Eunice spat the word out and slammed her bag on his desk. Then she looked apprehensive and a flush mounted into her pointed face. She said, "I'm sorry. You made me mad."

"We haven't heard from my sister Mavis for six months. She used to write us—my mother and me—every week. Then she stopped." Eunice's voice was hesitant at first, then became firm and she spoke more rapidly as she gained confidence.

"When we didn't hear from Mavis for so long, I came to Los Angeles to see her. But she's moved. And that place where she was living is an awful, rundown place. Really. The land-lady is awful, too. I asked her where Mavis had moved, but she said she didn't know and didn't care. When I asked her how long ago Mavis had moved, she swore at me and slammed the door in my face. You've got to help me, Mr. Delaney. Mother will be so worried."

"Yes—I imagine," Delaney said drily.

"What do you mean?" Eunice asked.

"The time for your mother to get worried was six months ago," Delaney said sharply. "Let's start over again. Suppose you fill in the background this time."

Eunice had a stricken look on her pale, fox-like face when she spoke again.

"Father passed away several

years ago. Since then mother has operated a little cafe in Benson where we girls were born and raised. Mavis and I had to help mother in the cafe. But Mavis didn't like it. She was too restless. Finally she went to stay with Uncle Jim Kennedy in Tucson.

"Mavis stayed with Uncle Jim for three years, then she came home. But she wasn't happy. Mavis was home only a few weeks when she left again. This time she went to Los Angeles."

Delaney grunted with impatience. "How long ago was that?"

"A—a little over a year ago," Eunice replied.

"And—?" Delaney prompted her bruskly.

"Mavis wrote us every week. Such cheerful letters. Then she stopped writing." Eunice looked at Delaney helplessly.

"Just like that? Her letters didn't become fewer and farther between?" Delaney watched Eunice closely.

"They—they just stopped coming," Eunice faltered. Then, lifting her chin, she added complacently, "So I came to Los Angeles to see Mavis."

"But you waited six months to do it. You sure worried about your precious sister," Delaney said disgustedly.

"I—I had to help mother," Eunice protested tearfully.

Delaney shook his head. "I don't get it. If you were so upset by what you found here, why didn't you go to the police?"

"Oh no. Mavis wouldn't like that," Eunice said firmly.

"This is a big city," Delaney said flatly. "There's more than two million people here. The police have organization, manpower, equipment—"

"Please. Won't you help me?" Eunice pleaded. Her hand dove into her purse and came up with a wad of money.

Taken back, Delaney stared at the roll of bills which had partially opened in her hand. He could see several fifties and some twenties. He estimated she was holding six or seven hundred dollars in her hand.

Eunice said cautiously: "I'm willing to pay you something in advance. How much will it cost?"

She peeled off three fifties, then hesitantly added one more. Eunice shoved the four bills across the desk and put the others back in her purse. When Delaney didn't pick up the bills, she got a pinched, frightened look on her face. She patted the money, pushing it closer to him, and asked in a small voice: "What's the matter—isn't that enough?"

Delaney hesitated, looking at her narrowly. Then, without touching the money, he asked, "What does Mavis look like?"

Eunice eased back in her chair and let her breath out slowly. She smiled at him for the first time and

crossed her legs.

Surprised, Delaney caught a glimpse of smooth satiny roundness—a flash of gleaming ivory above nylons tightly rolled to slim, shapely knees. He looked at Eunice more closely and noted the firm, natural fullness under her frilly white blouse.

Eunice spoke hurriedly, watching his eyes. "Mavis is taller than I am. She has brown hair, wavy and full of highlights—not dull and flat like mine. And—and she's very pretty." Eunice dove into her bag and came up with a snapshot.

The picture was clear, with good detail and definition. It showed a woman about three years older than Eunice with bold, striking features. The eyes were large and widely spaced above prominent cheek bones. The nose was large and slightly up tilted above full, sensual lips framing a generous mouth. It was the face of a woman given to reckless impulses, not restraint. Mavis was wearing a white linen dress which clung to her show-girl figure and accented an exciting collection of lush curves. Delaney decided Mavis was quite a dish.

He studied the features and a puzzled frown creased his forehead. He looked at Eunice. "*Your* sister—?"

"My—half sister. My mother was married before."

Eunice spoke diffidently while a wave of color mounted into her face. She dropped her gaze and slowly uncrossed her legs, revealing more than was necessary. She dove into her bag again.

"Here's Mavis' address. The one I went to. You—you'll start looking for her right away?"

Eunice left her chair and laid a pencilled slip of paper on Delaney's desk. She stood expectantly while her eyes questioned him.

Delaney rose to his feet, slowly shaking his head. He picked up the money, folding it, and pressed it into her hand. He said: "You'd better go to the police, Eunice."

"But why? I—I don't understand," she cried, her eyes filling with tears.

"Like I said before, this is a big city. I'm only one guy. I can't take your money," Delaney said flatly.

Putting the bills in her purse, Eunice turned blindly towards the door. Her figure sagged and her heels dragged across the floor.

Delaney started to speak, then shrugged his shoulders. He rounded his desk with a grin and lifted her hat from her head.

Startled, Eunice was too surprised to move.

"Leave it off when you go to the cops," he suggested softly.

"Oh—!" she gasped, snatching her hat from his hand, her tears gone, her face flaming. "I never met such an impertinent man."

Delaney watched her flounce out of the room then settled in his chair. He started to drop the snap-

shot of Mavis and the pencilled slip of paper in the waste basket, then carelessly tossed them into a desk drawer. He was just closing the drawer when Elsie's slim elegant figure slid into the room.

"Al—what happened?"

"I passed her on to the cops," Delaney grinned. Then, as Elsie's eyes widened with surprise, he quickly summarized Eunice's story.

"Something's fishy," he finished firmly. "It smells. I wouldn't touch the deal with a ten foot pole."

After Elsie returned to the reception room, Delaney settled back in his chair and put his feet on the desk. He stared unseeingly out the window while his thoughts turned to Eunice and her half sister Mavis. He was trying to find the gimmick.

The soft swoosh of the reception room door didn't register with Delaney, nor Elsie's startled, half smothered cry. But the sharp, metallic click of the latch on the door of his private office penetrated his thoughts. Before he could move, an enormous hand sent his feet crashing to the floor.

A bald, bullet shaped head with thick, beetling brows and a heavy, undershot jaw faced Delaney across his desk. The head was sunk into wide, sloping shoulders above a thick, muscular body. A houndstooth sport jacket, over a black, turtle-neck sweater, threatened to burst its seams at the shoulders and around the massive arms.

Then the slight, twisted figure of a crippled ex-jockey eased into the room and leaned back against the closed door. The figure was draped in a green, sharkskin suit. The dead pan face owned a pair of dark, beady eyes set in thin, wizened features. One claw like hand wore a blue-black Luger pointed unwaveringly at Delaney. To Delaney, the 9 mm bore looked like the mouth of a cannon.

"Some guys are dumb—and you're it, pal." Baldy was grinning at Delaney.

"You're so tough—why the stooge with a gun?" Delaney glared, starting from his chair.

Baldy put his enormous hand in Delaney's face and shoved him back.

"Easy, pal. We'll find out how tough we are. Only first I wanna tell you why you're stupid." Baldy was grinning but there was little humor in his eyes.

"Okay, wise guy. What's on your mind?" Delaney snapped. He had seen neither of the men before.

A rasp crept into Baldy's voice. "You been around. You should know better than to take on a deal like that."

"What deal—and what makes it your business what deal I take on?" Delaney's voice rose in anger.

Suddenly Baldy laughed. "Such a homely little broad."

"Such a scared little mouse—and now I know why," Delaney snapped. He knew then the visit

tied in with Eunice, with her sister Mavis.

"Sure she's scared," Baldy agreed. "But her coming to you was a dumb play. First she goes snooping around in something that ain't her business. Then she comes to you."

"And that ain't all," Baldy straightened up, "then you gotta take her on. You gotta find her sister for her she says. That makes you stupid."

"You gonna yak all day?" The figure by the door spoke for the first time. "Let's get goin'."

"My, my—it's got a voice. It can talk," Delaney said sarcastically.

"It's got a gun, too, and it can shoot," Baldy warned flatly. He crossed the room and looked out the window. Over his shoulder he added, "It's snowed to the gills, and it's trigger happy. So sit still—very still—and don't get ideas."

"Shut up and get goin." The wizened features developed a nervous tic and the dark, venomous eyes glared at Delaney. The twisted figure leaned forward in a crouch and moved the Luger threateningly.

Delaney let his breath out carefully and sat very still.

Baldy closed the venetian blinds and turned to the file cabinet by the window. He pulled the top drawer open and emptied its contents on the floor. He threw the metal drawer into a corner of the room and turned to the next one. Baldy repeated the performance with each file drawer until he had emptied the cabinet.

"You damn fool. I didn't take her on. I turned down the deal," Delaney exploded.

"Too bad—you should've told us when we came in, pal." Baldy grinned, returning to the desk. His scalp glistened with perspiration.

Delaney's face was white with rage. He swore and, bracing his feet under his chair, glared at Baldy.

"Go on, jump. Take a swing at him." The twisted figure took two steps from the door, pausing in a crouch, egging Delaney on, the Luger steady in the claw like hand.

Delaney sank back in his chair.

Baldy laughed. His enormous hands twisted the desk lamp until its metal frame snapped. He dropped the pieces on the floor and picked up the telephone. He yanked the phone cord loose and threw the telephone into the corner of the room with the file drawers. The client's chair followed it. Baldy rested his hands on the desk and leaned over. He was no longer grinning. He said:

"There's just one reason for all this, if you ain't already guessed it, pal. You never heard of Mavis Blair, and you ain't lookin' for her."

Baldy moved around the end of the desk and reached for the top drawer on that side. He hesitated as Delaney's muscles tensed and warned, "Don't be a damn fool."

Delaney's eyes slid to the twisted figure midway between his desk and the door. The knuckles of the claw like hand were white around the Luger.

"Go ahead," the figure invited.

Delaney cursed and froze in his chair.

Without taking his eyes from Delaney, Baldy eased the drawer open and removed Delaney's .45. He slipped the magazine clip from the handle and worked the slide, ejecting the cartridge from the chamber. He hefted the gun on the palm of his hand, half turning as though to leave the desk, then wheeled and with a full arm swing slammed the gun in Delaney's face.

The room exploded in a red haze as Delaney went over backwards in his chair. A club like fist smashed into his belly with the force of a sledge hammer. Delaney retched and tried to roll free. But Baldy straddled him with arms working like pistons. Delaney tried to lash out with his foot, but a massive knee pinned his legs to the floor. He could only cover his face with his arms and roll his upper body from side to side as heavy, jarring blows smashed into his rib cage. Then the barrel of the Luger landed on his head and Delaney fell into a bottomless pit of black silence.

The black silence changed to a gray silence, then to a silence filled with light and pain. Delaney opened his eyes. The two men were gone. He dragged himself to his feet and staggered into the reception room. Delaney swore bitterly.

Elsie lay where she had been slung across the leather sofa. Her hands were bound behind her back with adhesive tape. Her ankles were crossed and similarily bound, and a wide strip of adhesive was plastered across her mouth. Her dress and slip were caught up across her thighs and she writhed with shame. Her eyes were wild with hate.

A cold rage filled Delaney as he pulled Elsie's dress down and ripped the adhesive from her mouth.

"Goddamnit, Delaney, can't you protect me even in your own office?" Elsie stormed, tears of helpless anger streaming down her face.

"Take it easy, baby. Take it easy," Delaney stripped the adhesive from her wrists and ankles.

"You get those filthy pigs!" Elsie sobbed and shuddered with revulsion.

"I'll get them. Don't worry—I'll get them, baby," Delaney promised, his voice thick, grating.

"Oh, Al—! Why—? What was it all about?" Elsie wept.

Delaney sank into her chair and pulled her phone across the desk. He dialed and fought back a wave of nausea. While the receiver made its usual sounds in his ear, he said:

"I don't know, Elsie. It ties in with that Eunice Blair."

Then a tired voice at the other

end of the line said, "Yeah—?"

"Hello, Gus. This is Al Delaney. Two guys just worked me over and wrecked my office. I want to make a locate on them."

"The hell you say—!" Surprised, Gus' voice lost its lethargy. "Who were they?"

"I don't know. I've never seen either of them before, but they shouldn't be hard to find." Tersely Delaney described the pair.

"Can do," Gus said after a pause. "Where are you now?"

"I'm still in my office."

"Okay, Al. Wait there. I'll call you back inna hour."

Delaney wearily pushed the phone away. Elsie had regained her composure. She said contritely:

"I'm sorry, Al. I didn't mean to carry on like that. I—I just couldn't help it."

"Don't be sorry, baby," Delaney's voice was grim as he rose from her chair. His face was pale under the tan and his eyes glittered. He asked, "Just one thing—did that Eunice leave an address?"

"No, but she did give me a phone number where she can be reached."

"Good." Delaney went to the wash basin in the cloak closet. He tore off his tie and started to unbutton his shirt, then turned solicitously:

"Why don't you take the rest of the day off—"

"Oh no," Elsie protested. "I'm all right, Al."

"Okay. Then go rest for a while and fix yourself up. When you get back, get Eunice on the phone. Have her here in the morning."

When Elsie left the office, Delaney stripped to his waist, splashed cold water over his head and face. His face was bruised on one side, his teeth in his upper jaw ached with a dull throb and his body was mottled with angry red blotches where the hammer like fists had bruised his flesh. He took a sponge bath and dressed.

Delaney put the file drawers back in the cabinet and straightened up the office as well as he could without trying to sort and refile the papers. He loaded the .45, slipped on his harness and nested the gun under his arm. He had just finished when the phone in the reception room rang.

Gus wasted no words. "The big ape is a slob named Kostka—strictly strong arm. The gunsel is Ziggy Weitzel. Watch out for him. He's got a monkey on his back and he's unpredictable. I hear the boys are working for a syndicate—dope, smut and flesh. So be careful."

"To hell with that. Where can I find them?"

"They hang around the Can-Can Club in Gardena. You can find them there any night after eleven."

"Thanks, Gus. I'll see you tomorrow or the day after."

The address which Eunice had given Delaney was in Sawtelle.

The street ran north from Santa Monica Boulevard a few short blocks to the Veterans' Home. It was a street of old frame dwellings behind ancient palms, set in small, littered yards behind sagging picket fences.

Delaney cruised slowly along the street until he spotted the number Eunice had given him, then parked the Chrysler at the curb.

The house was a bungalow with board and batten sides almost hidden under lantana which mounted to its tar papered roof. A faded room for rent sign was in one front window. A covered porch sagged across the front of the house two broken steps above the ground.

Delaney entered the house and waited for his eyes to make their adjustment from the bright sun outside. Two doors, once white, faced each other from opposite sides of the dingy hall. One of them was labelled "Manager" in crudely drawn letters. He shattered the somnolent quiet with hard knuckles rapping on a loose panel in a door which rattled against its latch.

There was no response.

Delaney heard muffled sounds in the room, meaningless because they lacked the direction of motion. Then he heard the faint creaking of spring cushions protesting the slow shifting of imposed weight. He heard the dull thud of a hard object striking a thinly carpeted floor. Then the silence descended again. He swore under his breath and tried the door. It wasn't locked.

The woman was fat, frowsy and drunk. She sprawled soddenly on an ancient davenport, glaring at Delaney with little pig eyes deep set in a bloated face. Thin strands of black, oily hair escaped from a bun loosely gathered on top of her head. A shapeless house dress rode above massive knees carelessly exposed. The woman made only a feeble effort to pull her dress down.

"To hell with it," she said hoarsely. "Gimme a drink."

Her eyes searched a lamp table at the end of the davenport littered with papers and bric-abrac. She grunted with disappointment and looked at the cushion beside her where an ashtray lay face down in a welter of cigarette butts. She muttered a curse and looked at Delaney.

"Where is it?" she asked helplessly.

Delaney closed the door and crossed the room. A half empty wine bottle had spilled the remainder of its contents on the worn carpet beside her feet. Delaney squatted in front of her and held up the bottle. He shook his head, "Too bad. It's all gone, sister."

The woman wiped her fore-arm across her mouth and pushed her hair back with a defeated gesture.

"More in the kitchen," she grunted. "Gimme . . ."

Delaney found the bottle of cheap wine in a cupboard over the sink. He rinsed out a glass and

took the wine and the glass back into the room. He half filled the glass and handed it to the woman.

She grabbed it eagerly, cupping the glass with both hands, and gulped the wine, spilling some of it past the corners of her mouth. When it was gone, she held out her arm.

"More," she panted.

Delaney tilted the bottle towards the glass, then deliberately drew it back without pouring any. He said: "Ixnay. First we talk about Mavis Blair."

The woman's eyes followed the bottle, then came up to meet his. Her face was mottled and contorted with anger. She shoved out the glass and snarled, "Gimme a drink, dammit."

Delaney drew the snapshot of Mavis from his pocket and held it out for the woman to see.

"Mavis Blair," he said. "Where'd she move?"

The woman ignored the snapshot and gestured with her glass.

Delaney shook his head. "Come on—give. This babe lived here. Where'd she move?"

The woman squinted at the snapshot, wiping her mouth with her fore-arm again. She looked up blandly at Delaney and grunted, "Never seen her."

He snorted and waited until his anger subsided a little then carefully poured two fingers of wine into her glass.

"Take another look," he suggested evenly, holding the snapshot just beyond the woman's reach.

"To hell with that," the woman snarled, squinting at the wine while she tilted the glass back and forth to gauge the amount. Suddenly she drew back her arm and flung the glass at Delaney's head.

"Gimme the bottle," she cried hoarsely.

Delaney ducked in time to avoid catching the glass with his face. He set the wine bottle on the table and grabbed the woman's wrist as she reached for it. He jerked her erect on the davenport and swung his other arm from the shoulder. His open hand smacked across her face with a resounding slap.

"Let's stop horsing around," he said flatly. "We're going to talk about Mavis Blair. Where'd she move?"

The woman spat at him and hurled the ashtray. She lurched to her feet, cursing obscenely, and came at him with fingers hooked like talons.

Delaney knocked her arms down and pushed her back onto the davenport. He rocked her head back and forth with hard, stinging slaps then crossed her wrists, pinning them together with one hand while he raised the other ready to strike. He thrust his face close to hers, his lips skinned back from clenched teeth, and his voice cut like a whip.

"Wise up. Either you talk, or I'll slap you silly!"

Panting from her exertions, the woman glared defiantly at him until the cold menace in his eyes reached her wine soaked brain. Then she quailed and her eyes veered to the bottle on the table.

"Not yet," Delaney snapped, moving the bottle out of her reach. He held up the snapshot again. "Let's talk about Mavis."

"That tramp," the woman grunted. "She's moved. How do I know where she's gone?"

"How long ago?"

"Week—two weeks. I dunno. Her rent was paid 'til a Saturday. Then one day in the middle of the week she's gone. So what."

Delaney handed her the bottle. He saw a rent receipt book on the table and leafed through it. He found the carbon of Mavis' last receipt, dated ten days back, and noted the room number. He turned to the woman.

"Her room rented?"

The woman leaned back against a grimy pillow at the end of the davenport and looked at Delaney. She raised the bottle and let the wine pour down her throat without visibly swallowing it. Finally she lowered the bottle and wiped her mouth.

"I ain't had time to clean it up," she answered, while a lascivious expression stole over her face. She moved, as if to make room for him on the davenport beside her, and gestured with the bottle. She grinned crookedly, "Sit down. Take a load off your feet."

Delaney swore under his breath and strode from the room followed by the woman's raucous, drunken laughter.

The girl stood in the opposite doorway, leaning against the jamb. A dressing gown, carelessly open at the top, was wrapped tightly around her full hips and long, tapering thighs. There was nothing under the dressing gown but a firm body covered with smooth, finely textured, milk-white skin. She was above average in height: a bottle blonde with hard features softened by a nice smile.

"What'd you expect—Lady Astor?" Surprisingly, her voice was low pitched, not hard. "You spare a cigarette?"

"You hear that drunken sot?" Delaney demanded, offering the girl a cigarette and lighting it for her.

"Tastes good," she said, gratefully dragging on the cigarette. Her smile broadened, "I think they heard her down at the corner."

Delaney grunted.

"You looking for Mavis?" the girl asked.

"Yes. Are you a friend of hers?" Delaney's eyes narrowed.

The girl shrugged. "Mavis isn't a girl to make friends with other girls. Kinda high-hat where women are concerned, if you know what I mean."

"But you knew her?" Delaney persisted. "I'd like to talk with you.

May I come in?"

"Look, mister," the girl hesitated. Her eyes took stock of Delaney from his head to his feet, then came up to search his face. "Maybe you're a cop. Maybe you're an all right guy. I don't know. But I don't want trouble—either now or later."

Delaney smiled. "No trouble, and I'm not a cop. How about it?"

Her room was like any other in a cheap rooming house in an unsavory district. It contained a minimum of furniture, a piece of worn carpeting on a linoleum floor, a few pathetic splashes of color to relieve the dreariness. But it was clean—unlike the room across the hall.

Delaney lowered himself into a chair and watched the girl cross the room. His eyes kindled and he expressed his appreciation with a sharp intake of breath.

The girl settled on a studio couch and smiled at him with amused tolerance. Her smile grew up to a laugh and she warned: "No trouble—and no wrestling. This was your idea, not mine."

Delaney grinned. "Okay. What can you tell me about Mavis? Where'd she work? Who'd she know?"

The girl stirred uneasily and studied her finger nails. "You say you're not a cop, but you ask a lot of questions. Who are you? What's your interest in Mavis?"

"I'm Al Delaney, a private investigator. Here—" he pulled his chair closer and flipped open his billfold to show her his license. "What's your name?"

"Gladys." She dragged on her cigarette, her eyes searching his face. "What's this all about, Al?"

"I'll give it to you straight, Gladys." Delaney lit a fresh cigarette and leaned forward. "I've got a client who wants to locate this Mavis Blair, but doesn't want a lot of cops nosing around. But all I get to work on is her background, her picture and this address. If I knew where she worked, I might get a lead. You know?"

"Mavis didn't have a steady job, Al." Gladys lowered her eyes to avoid meeting his.

"But what did she do? Waitress? Car hop in some drive-in?"

"No—nothing like that."

Delaney grunted with impatience. A slight edge crept into his voice: "What's the matter—she a sidewalk angel?"

"Mr. Delaney!" Gladys laughed, but an angry gleam lurked in her eyes.

"Okay," Delaney grinned. "So I opened my big mouth and put both feet in it. But a girl has to live. The question is how? And you don't seem to want to tell me."

He tried another tack. "Let's quit playing games. Did Mavis have a steady boy-friend?"

"Keeping her in a dump like this?" Gladys snorted and shook

her head.

"What does she do?" Delaney asked softly.

"Mavis is a model—a photographer's model," Gladys replied with a tone of finality, as though she need say no more.

Delaney looked at Gladys narrowly for a moment. Then he said slowly: "I don't suppose Mavis poses for what the trade calls 'high fashion' shots. No pictures for Vogue or Harpers Bazaar?"

Gladys laughed shortly.

"Lengerie? Foundation garments?"

Gladys shook her head.

"Pin-ups? Cheesecake?" Delaney probed a little deeper.

"You could call it that—if you want to, Al."

"But you don't," he grunted. "I'm beginning to get the idea. Who'd she pose for, Gladys?"

"Not any one guy. Several." Gladys rose to her feet. She said nervously: "Look, Al, I can't tell you any more. I've said too much already."

"But you haven't told me anything," he protested, leaving his chair and following her across the room.

"Yes I have," she paused with her hand on the door knob and looked at him. "I—I don't want trouble. Guess I can't take it any more."

"But the town is full of photographers—amateur, professional, legitimate and otherwise," he pleaded, placing his hand over hers.

Gladys shook her head. "That's asking for it. Believe me—I know. This racket is organized. A girl who speaks out of turn can get in real trouble."

"Please, baby." Delaney was getting desperate. He said, "I'm only one guy."

Gladys hesitated.

Delaney reached into his pocket, then studied her face. He drew his hand out empty and placed it on her shoulder. He said softly: "I know it's tough. I know what you mean by trouble. But I know how to protect my sources of information. If somebody had given you a break when you were starting out, maybe—"

"Damn you," she breathed. Then leaning closer to him, she said rapidly in a low voice:

"There's a joint on Cahuenga near Santa Monica Boulevard. They don't shoot the pictures there. It's a processing plant and distribution center. But the jerks who bring their film in to be developed and printed, book their models through the guy on the counter. He has pictures of all the girls—their names, addresses and phone numbers."

"Thanks, baby." Delaney squeezed her shoulder, then dropped his hand. He said, "If you need—"

Gladys interrupted him by opening the door and pushing him into the hall. Her face was flushed and her eyes avoided his. She tossed her

head and said stridently: "Don't try to soft soap me. On your way. Blow!"

The door slammed in his face.

When Delaney pulled the Chrysler away from the curb, he glanced in the rear-view mirror just in time to see a gray Ford two-door pull out a half a block behind. Delaney turned west on Santa Monica Boulevard, driving with one eye on the mirror. There were two men in the Ford following him. He turned south, off the boulevard, and lost them in the back streets of the business district of Sawtelle.

Delaney cut back to the boulevard and turned east. Once he was out of the business district, he headed for the nearest gas station with an outside phone booth. He didn't know whether he had been followed from his office or whether he had been picked up at Mavis' address. One thing was sure: whoever "they" were, they knew now that he was looking for Mavis. When Elsie answered the phone, he said:

"Put a cover on that typewriter, gorgeous. You're going to take a trip."

"Me—?" Elsie gasped.

Delaney laughed, then explained. "You're going to Tucson this afternoon. Make your reservation on American Air, Flight 12."

"But why—? What do you want me to do?"

"I want a complete run down on that Uncle Jim Kennedy Eunice mentioned. I want to know his business, his bank, what property he owns. Also I want to know his standing in the community and, if you can find out, his relations with the Blairs in Benson. I'll meet you at the airport at five."

"Five o'clock—?" Elsie squealed.

"Sure," Delaney laughed. "I'll—"

"My hair—!" Elsie wailed. "What'll I wear?"

"You've got time to go home, pack and get to the airport by five. This trip should take only a couple of days. You won't need many clothes. I'll have some money for you at the reservation desk."

Delaney stepped out of the booth and stopped with a curse. The gray Ford was parked alongside his Chrysler and the two men were out of the car. They were smarter than he had given them credit for. Apparently they, too, had cut back to the boulevard, after losing him, and had spotted his car in the gas station.

One was tall and lean and the long bladed switch knife in his hand glittered in the hot sun. He had a long, sharp boned, swarthy face under dark, duck-billed hair. His expression was impassive but his eyes were as sharp and coldly calculating as the eyes of a cobra.

The other one was shorter, heavier and the brass knuckles glinted on his right hand. He had a wide, slavic face topped with a blond crew-cut. He looked as poised and

as competent as his companion —but not as impassive. His lips were parted in a grin of anticipation.

Delaney angled to his left, away from the booth, towards his car. As the two men converged on him, Delaney dropped to the pavement, landing half on his side, on hip and shoulder as the swarthy one made his lunge. Delaney's foot came up under the knife thrust in a savage, driving kick. The toe of his shoe landed solidly in the knifer's groin.

In an almost continuous motion, Delaney rolled and pushed from the pavement, coming up inside the vicious hook of the brass knuckles. He caught the right wrist of the man and twisted it behind the man's back, forcing the arm up, forcing the big body to jack-knife as muscles and tendons were wrenched and torn. At the same time, Delaney cupped the back of the man's head with his free hand.

Delaney's face twisted in a grimace of ferocity as he threw his whole weight against the man, rushing him across the pavement, shoulders and head down to slam into the nearest gas pump. The pump clanked and gave off a dull, sickening crump under the impact. The thug's body sprawled grotesquely at the base of the pump as Delaney stepped back.

Two gas station attendants, who had deserted the nearby grease rack when the action started, stood ten feet away. They stared at Delaney, at the thug lying by the pump, at the other writhing on the pavement. Their eyes were wide and scared, their mouths open in shocked amazement. One of them drew a long, unsteady breath and asked, "Jesus, mister, where did you go to school?"

"In a place too rough for these jerks," Delaney snapped.

The big blond hadn't moved. His head was broken and his face lay in a slowly widening pool of blood. He would lie there, Delaney decided, until the cops picked him up for a free ride to the morgue. The knifer was on his hands and knees, his arms rigidly braced, his head hanging between them, his body wracked with pain. His face was the color of wet cement and saliva drooled in long, elastic threads from his open mouth as he breathed in hoarse, agonized gasps.

A woman on the sidewalk, who had watched the action with unbelieving eyes, began to scream. Her voice rose in a thin keening sound above the traffic noise to break and rise again.

"You better call the cops," Delaney said. He walked to his car and drove out of the station. Nobody tried to stop him.

The building was on the east side of Cahuenga, and Delaney looked it over as he drove slowly past. It was painted a dark, decorators gray,

and the large windows on each side of the entrance had been replaced with glass brick. Next to it, on the north, and separated from it by a narrow passageway, was a vacant building. Beyond that, and extending to the end of the block, was a drive-in restaurant. Delaney parked his Chrysler in front of the vacant building and walked back.

The lettering on the door read FILM ENTERPRISES and inside was a small lobby filled with cheap reception room furniture. A counter faced with combed plywood ran the length of one side.

Behind the counter was a sallow face with a receding chin above a prominent adams apple in a scrawny throat. The face owned a pair of spaniel eyes, separated by a knife-blade nose, and red, over-ripe lips. The face was topped by black, kinky hair plastered to an under sized head.

Delaney rested his elbows on the counter and rolled a wad of paper back and forth between the palms of his hands. He leaned forward confidentially and said:

"So I'm in a hotel room in Phoenix, and this guy's showing me some pictures. Girlie pictures."

Spaniel eyes wet his lips nervously and looked at Delaney. He asked, "Are you fired?"

"Girlie pictures," Delaney repeated firmly. "Hot stuff."

"You must be off your rocker," spaniel eyes was watching Delaney's hands.

The wad of paper began to get unwadded. It was green and it had a pattern with a greenish white border. It was like a conjurer's trick: an edge of the pattern showed, then a little more. Then a numerical figure in one corner—only the figure couldn't be read because the paper curled back over itself to show more pattern. It was tantalizing.

And spaniel eyes was fascinated.

Delaney said, "High class, too. Not like the trash that comes out of Nogales or Tia Juana. Beautiful stuff."

Spaniel eyes could read the figure on the paper now. It was slowly emerging from between Delaney's hands—rising tenuously above them, turning and twisting. Spaniel eyes nervously wet his lips again. He swallowed, and his adams apple bounced in his throat threatening to choke him. He asked hoarsely:

"What're you trying to say, mister? Whatcha want?"

"I try to buy the pictures off the guy, but he won't sell," Delaney's voice was soft. He kept his eyes on spaniel eyes while his hands slowly stretched and ironed the ten spot on the counter. "So we toss the breeze some more, and I say I'm coming to L.A. Then the guy tells me he got the pictures here.

" 'Film Enterprises on Cahuenga," he tells me. 'There's a sharp cookie on the counter who knows the score,' he says."

Spaniel eyes shook his head regretfully. Then it seemed he owned a pair of hands. They appeared on the edge of the counter with softly white, spatulate fingers which crept towards the bill, then retreated. Only they wanted to creep out to the bill again, and their owner had to pull them back. He said:

"The guy gave you a bum steer. He sold you a three dollar bill, mister."

"He wouldn't do that," Delaney protested quickly, pained surprise in his voice. "He was a right guy."

"Look, mister," spaniel eyes interrupted flatly, "we don't sell nothin' here. This is a processin' plant. We develop negatives. Print positives. Black and white, or full color."

Delaney grunted. He turned the bill over and began to iron the other side. He said, "What d'you take me for—a square?"

White, spatulate fingers did an adagio along the edge of the counter while spaniel eyes tried to read Delaney's face, then watched Delaney's hand move back and forth over the green pattern.

Delaney said: "So I come to L.A. and rent an apartment in a dump on DeLongpre. I get a 4 x 5 Graflex and some film packs. For lighting, I get a couple of floods and a baby spot. I get a lot of ideas and I think I'm in business. But I need a model."

"You slay me," spaniel eyes licked his lips and swallowed. When his adams apple stopped bouncing, he added, "I'm screaming with sorrow for you."

"There's a model in one of the pictures the guy showed me I could really go for," Delaney lowered his voice and leaned closer. "Beautiful. I mean she's really thrown together. Guy said her name's Doris, or Iris, or something like that. You know her?"

"You kiddin—?" spaniel eyes sneered, but he avoided meeting Delaney's gaze.

Delaney moved his hands from the bill and let them rest palms up on the counter. He said:

"Guy tells me there's a book under the counter with pictures of girls in it. Lots of girls. Names, addresses, phone numbers, everything. How about it?"

"This guy seems to know a hell of a lot," spaniel eyes complained, white, spatulate fingers very still on the edge of the counter. "He have a name?"

Delaney slowly shook his head and looked away. When he looked back, the ten spot was gone.

"Okay. You couldn't know all that 'thout talkin' with somebody who did," spaniel eyes came up from under the counter with a book in his hands. "So I'll take a chance on you. But of all the screwy approaches—that beats anything I ever heard."

Delaney grinned.

The book was a black, three ring binder, and the fillers were cheap,

lined paper. On each page was pasted a 5 x 7 glossy print of a nude girl. A different girl on every page, and lots of pages. Each girl had struck a pose calculated to show to best advantage her most outstanding attractions. All of the "studies" were full figure: some girls faced the camera directly, others didn't, but none of them were suffering from an excess of modesty.

Under each picture were neatly typed the girl's statistics. Under each description were her name, address and phone number . . . Selma . . . Ruth . . . Gladys . . . Cynthia . . .

And Delaney leafed the pages slowly, pausing to comment on one girl, then another.

Dorothea . . . Frances . . . Mildred . . . Mavis . . .

Delaney snapped his fingers in simulated excitement. "That's the one. That's the babe! Mavis. How do I go about lining her up?"

"You don't. Not if it's the chick I think it is." Spaniel eyes turned the book around to see.

"Why not?" Delaney groaned.

"She's moved. Week or so ago, she up and disappears. I get calls for her, and I'm tryin to contact her. See? I go way out to Sawtelle where her address is," white, spatulate fingers tapping the page, sliding caressingly over the picture of Mavis, "but she's gone."

Delaney began to curse under his breath.

"Wait—! I'm tryin to tell you," spaniel eyes complained, eager to please, having committed himself. "Yesterday I get a call from her. From Mavis. She's in Long Beach, and she's on her way back here. But she's gotta find a place to live. An address. And a phone. She tells me she's coming in as soon as she gets located. And she wants a job right away. Needs the dough.

"So you're it, mister. Come back tomorrow or the next day. I'll fix you up."

"Swell," Delaney grinned. "Like the guy said—there's a smart cookie on the counter. Thanks."

Delaney saw Elsie off on the plane to Tucson then ate an early dinner at the *Buggywhip* on his way back from the airport. He caught a news flash on his car radio describing the fight in the gas station in Sawtelle. He learned one man was dead and the other was in a hospital where his condition was listed as critical. Police reported they were seeking the intended victim of the assault whose identity was unknown. After listening to a purported description of himself, Delaney concluded the police were not about to hang a tag on him. Apparently nobody had noted the license number of his car which was described merely as a late model sedan.

The figure of a can-can dancer, outlined in red neon tubing, identified the building on the outskirts

of Gardena, a suburb of Los Angeles. The parking lot was nearly full, but Delaney found a vacant slot facing the street. He checked his gun, then entered the club.

A bar with a low back bar extended across the front of the building. A wide passageway at one end led to a crescent shaped area beyond. The area was jambed with tables, with a crowd of people packed in knee to knee, elbow to elbow. In the center of the crescent was a dance floor stage raised to table top level.

At one end of the stage was a four piece combo beating out a rhythm number. In the center of the stage was a tall, red headed stripper with an over-ripe figure. She was nearing the end of her routine—down to a G-string and a few spangles glittering on a mesh bra. But the crowd was in a frenzy, and the red head was in no hurry to leave the stage.

Delaney elbowed his way to the bar and ordered bourbon over ice. While sipping his bourbon, he scanned the crowd around him. The two he was seeking were at the end of the bar watching the stripper. When she finally finished her number, they turned back to their drinks.

Delaney watched the dark, beady eyes in the thin, wizened features move along the row of faces. They slid past him, then jerked back—wide with recognition. He saw the thin, pipestem elbow nudge Kostka, and the look of surprise cross Kostka's face. Then Kostka grinned.

Delaney leaned back. Off the far end of the room, he saw a hallway with marked doors on each side. The first door on the left was the one he wanted. He pushed through the door and noted with satisfaction he was alone in the room. A moment later Kostka and Ziggy entered.

"Didn't expect to see you here tonight, pal," Kostka grinned, standing just inside the door. He was facing Delaney who stood with his back to the opposite wall.

"I suppose not," Delaney's answering grin was tight lipped. "But I'm blowing the whistle on you. I'm going to show you how a real tough job is done."

"Don't be that way, pal. We got nuttin' personal against you." Kostka's grin was bland. He casually moved from the door to Delaney's right.

Ziggy started to edge away from the door to Delaney's left. When he spoke, his voice was wooden and flat: "you know how't is. We got a call, we do a job."

"Yeah, that's right. We're glad to see you're okay, pal," Kostka moved again.

"Sure, I know," Delaney moved closer to Ziggy. He was watching both men, but of the two, he knew Ziggy was the most dangerous. "Only you never should have roughed up that girl in my office."

"Aw—don't be that way, pal,"

Kostka protested again. "We didn't hurt the broad."

Ziggy tried to edge past Delaney, but Delaney moved closer and Ziggy stopped. His thin, wizened features became set and his dark, beady eyes began to blaze with venom.

"What's the matter, buster, you getting nervous? You got to go?" Delaney sneered.

Ziggy swore obscenely and one claw-like hand started under his coat. But he was too slow.

Delaney whipped out his .45 and slugged Ziggy, then turned.

Kostka lunged forward in a crouch, his head hunkered down between his shoulders, his massive arms swung out in front of him. He stopped abruptly when he saw the .45 in Delaney's hand.

"Whatcha gonna do?" Kostka straightened slightly and tried a grin on for size. "Don't be a sucker, You'd never get away with it. Lotsa guys outside—they'd tear you apart."

"Why don't you call them?" Delaney asked thinly. Then his face became white with rage, his lips skinned back from his teeth and he moved closer. "Come on, you gutless slob. Why don't you yell?"

"Take it easy—take it easy, pal," Kostka's grin was sick with fear. He straightened up and stretched out one hand in a placating gesture. "No need for us to be this way. We can—"

Delaney kicked him in the belly and Kostka doubled over with an explosive grunt of pain. Delaney swung the .45 hard against the side of Kostka's head, then caught him under the arms. Kostka was stunned, but he wasn't out. Delaney heaved him upright and let go. As Kostka sagged on rubbery legs, Delaney slammed the .45 across the bridge of his nose. Kostka bellowed like a bull in mortal pain and blood streamed down his front. Delaney beat him into insensibility, pistol whipping him mercilessly all the way to the floor.

Delaney turned in time to see Ziggy lurch to his knees. Ziggy was mouthing curses and shaking his head to clear it. He dragged the Luger from under his arm and swung its muzzle in a wavering arc. Before he could steady the gun, the toe of Delaney's shoe broke his wrist. A bewildered expression crossed Ziggy's face and he stared in wonder at his broken wrist. Then his other hand snaked out to the Luger on the floor. But Delaney stamped on the crooked fingers, breaking them, and kicked the gun out of reach. He jerked Ziggy to his feet and pinned him against the wall. He drove his knee into Ziggy's groin and stepped back.

Ziggy was writhing and screaming on the floor. Delaney backed to the side of the room and pointed his .45 at the door. He wondered how long the screaming could continue unnoticed by the crowd around the bar. Then the door flew

open.

Both of them were big, both were ill-fitted in tuxedos, both had *bouncer* written all over their coarse features. They came into the room with a rush, and the doorway behind them was immediately filled with the faces of a crowd attracted by the screaming. But the two stopped in their tracks when they saw the .45 in Delaney's fist.

For a moment they stared at the gun as though fascinated, then, moving in unison, their eyes swung to the broken figures on the floor.

"Ziggy Weitzel—!"

"And Kostka!"

Their eyes swung back to Delaney. One of them said slowly:

"You're dealing, mister. What's the play?"

Delaney pointed with his chin, "Over there. Move."

When the two moved, as directed, away from the door, he said flatly, "You know Ziggy and Kostka, so you must know who they work for. Tell their boss I don't like being pushed around."

The crowd fell back silently to let Delaney pass. He left the club unmolested and holstered his gun as he got into the Chrysler.

Delaney grinned when Eunice walked into his office the next morning. She was dressed in another frilly white blouse above the same black jersey skirt. But she was hatless. She had been to a hair dresser for a permanent and she was wearing lipstick. Delaney whistled softly and said:

"I *knew* it. Now, if you'd just change the shape of your glasses—"

"Mr. Delaney—*please*. It hasn't made that much difference." Eunice preened and laughed selfconsciously. She settled into a chair, placing her large leather bag on the corner of his desk and crossed her knees. Then her eyes widened.

"What—what happened to your face?"

Delaney gingerly touched the large bruise on his cheek and smiled wanly.

"Well, it seems I got into a little argument—" he let his voice trail off.

"Drinking, I suppose," Eunice sniffed disdainfully.

"Bourbon," Delaney answered gravely. "Lovely stuff."

"Mr. Delaney, I'm not sure you're very nice," Eunice was shocked. After a pause, she asked, "You wanted to see me?"

"Yes—thanks for coming in. Now tell me, have you been to the police yet?"

"Oh no. I told you Mavis wouldn't like that." Eunice looked at Delaney hopefully. "You've changed your mind—you're going to help me?"

Delaney nodded. "I went to that address you gave me yesterday. I had more success talking with the landlady than you did. I—"

"You know where Mavis moved?

You've found her?" Eunice broke in eagerly.

Delaney shook his head. "No. I haven't found Mavis yet."

"Oh . . ." Eunice was let down and worried again. Then she asked hopefully, "But—?"

Delaney smiled. "I have a lead. I can't tell you more than that. But I do have a lead and I hope to contact Mavis soon."

"Contact her. *Where?*" Eunice leaned forward, her eyes wide, her lips parted eagerly.

Still smiling, Delaney answered, "I can't tell you. It's too indefinite yet."

"But you must tell me. You must!" Eunice's face was suddenly flushed and her eyes grew strained behind her glasses. Her fingers beat a nervous tattoo on the edge of his desk, then dove into her purse. She looked at him speculatively while she slowly pushed four fifty dollar bills across his desk.

Delaney's eyes narrowed as he studied her face. After a moment, he picked up the bills and put them in his pocket. He said evenly:

"Your sister left that dump in Sawtelle to get out of town. Now, it seems, she's coming back. I don't know where she's going to stay—or if she even has a place to stay. I do know that if I am in a particular place sometime during the next two days I *may* be able to contact her."

Eunice glared at him, then forced herself to relax. The tension slowly left her slim figure, and she even achieved a smile.

"I'm sorry," she said contritely.

"That's the way it's got to be," Delaney said flatly.

Eunice picked up her bag and left her chair. She smiled apologetically and turned towards the door. She said, "You understand, it's just I'm so worried about her."

"Of course," Delaney answered perfunctorily without rising. He watched the deliberate swish of her hips as she left his office. Then his face hardened and he stared thoughtfully at the door.

Delaney waited until nearly noon, and made sure he was not being tailed, before driving to Film Enterprises on Cahuenga. He was uncertain of his reception. He didn't know if the syndicate which operated the racket had tied him in with Film Enterprises. But he had no alternative. The model booking activities at the processing plant were his only lead to Mavis. He pushed open the door.

Spaniel eyes grinned a welcome in memory of the bill Delaney had slipped him the day before, then slowly shook his head.

"No sign of her yet," he said regretfully.

"Damn. I hoped she'd been in," Delaney rested his elbows on the counter.

"Don't worry, she'll be in. Mavis is a good chick, and she needs the dough." Spaniel eyes looked at De-

laney hopefully.

Delaney grinned and lowered his voice: "I sure go for that babe. I hope somebody else doesn't get to her first."

Spaniel eyes greedily licked his lips and swallowed. When his adams apple stopped bouncing, he said:

"You say the word an' I'll see nobody gets to her. Only, it'll cost you."

"That stuff doesn't grow on trees," Delaney complained. "But there might be another ten spot for you."

"It's a deal," Spaniel eyes was all smiles. "What's the phone number on DeLongpre?"

Taken by surprise, Delaney said hastily, "Don't have a phone."

"Well, what's the address? I'll send her over as soon as she comes in."

"That's just a dump I rented to take some pictures in," Delaney grunted.

"Then how'll I—?"

"I'll contact you tomorrow," Delaney said smoothly. "When she comes in, you'll have her new address. So you tell me and I contact her."

"Okay . . ." But spaniel eyes was worried. He raised one hand, sliding his thumb suggestively back and forth across the ends of his white, spatulate fingers.

"Not so fast," Delaney laughed easily. "Time enough for that when I get her address. Besides—how else do I get her new address?"

"Yeah," spaniel eyes grinned, "that's right. Come back tomorrow. I'll fix you up."

Leaving spaniel eyes, Delaney waited in his car where he could watch the entrance, until Film Enterprises closed for the day. But Mavis didn't come in—of that he was sure.

He spent the evening in his apartment and he was worried. In reviewing events in his mind, Delaney became convinced the men behind the lewd picture racket also were looking for Mavis. Several things pointed to that conclusion. Mavis' sudden departure before her rent was due was one item. Gladys' statement the racket was organized, and that a girl who stepped out of line would get in trouble was a second item. The reporting, by the drunken housekeeper, of Eunice's search for Mavis was a third item. The attempt to pressure him out of the search, having followed Eunice to his office, was another item. When that failed, the attack on him by the thugs at the gas station proved the racket boys weren't playing games. Why Mavis was coming back, he didn't know. It was obvious Mavis didn't know what she was walking into, else she never would have contacted spaniel eyes. Then the model booking activities at the processing plant were the key to the situation. Whoever got there first got to Mavis. He was confident of only one thing. So far, the racket

boys hadn't tied him in with Film Enterprises. With that thought in mind, he went to bed.

Delaney groaned and rolled over.

The bell jangled harshly. It was insistent. Delaney began to swear. He turned on the reading lamp by the bed and looked at his watch. It was 2:10 AM and the bell rang again. He thought it would drive him nuts. He picked up the phone, and suddenly he was wide awake.

It was Elsie. She had returned from Tucson on the midnight plane. Delaney listened carefully while Elsie reported what she had learned. Jim Kennedy was a prominent citizen in Tucson. He maintained a five figure balance in the Southern Arizona Bank and Trust. He owned a successful mining property and a large acreage planted in cotton. Only Jim Kennedy had died three weeks ago. Delaney asked some questions, then told Elsie what had transpired while she was gone. After Elsie hung up, he went back to sleep.

By eight-thirty the next morning, both sides of Cahuenga were lined with parked cars. Delaney's Chrysler was just south of the entrance of Film Enterprises on the same side of the street. A black Oldsmobile two door, with two men sitting in the front seat, was parked at the street corner behind him.

By nine o'clock, Delaney was wanting a cup of coffee and the drive-in restaurant beyond Film Enterprises beckoned him. By nine-thirty, he thought he had never wanted a cup of coffee so much before in his life. In the hour he had been staked out in his car the only people who had entered the door he was watching were men. By ten o'clock, he could stand it no longer. He stepped from the car and glanced down the street behind him. The black Oldsmobile was coming slowly up the street in his direction. He noticed the car without really looking at it, and turned towards the restaurant. He had taken only a few steps when he saw the woman.

She was wearing a white, peasant blouse above a multi-colored dirndl and her feet were clad in thonged sandals. Her brown, wavy hair was partially covered by a silk bandana worn gypsy fashion with the ends trailing over one shoulder. She had striking features with eyes widely spaced above prominent cheek bones. Her attire was a far cry from a white, linen dress, but Delaney had no need to refer to the snapshot in his pocket to recognize Mavis Blair.

Mavis was in front of the vacant building beyond Film Enterprises and Delaney quickened his pace to stop her before she reached the entrance. She started along the face of the film Enterprises building, a brightly colorful figure against the dark gray of its painted wall.

Out of the corner of his eye, De-

laney saw the black Olds move slowly past. Something about the car attracted his attention and his eyes left Mavis. Delaney shouted hoarsely, and his hand streaked under his coat.

The muzzle of a blue-back Luger was showing in the open window of the right hand door of the car. It began to buck, and each time it did, a finger of orange flame stabbed the air. And the noise of its bucking slammed against the buildings.

Delaney leaped into the street. But even as he cleared the cars parked along the curb, the Olds accelerated with a roar of exhaust and a sharp, tortured chirping of tires. Delaney blasted with his .45. A frost white pattern of splintered glass appeared on the rear window of the car, then another. Without slowing, the Olds swerved to the left across the street. It side-swiped a parked car, careened wildly, and smashed into a second parked car with a sickening crash.

The right hand door of the Olds swung open. A man lurched from the car, saw Delaney, and started to run. Delaney yelled at him, then took careful aim. The .45 blasted again and the man went down with a shattered leg.

Delaney ignored the man in the street. Already people who had witnessed, or heard the gunfire from nearby buildings, were gathering in a knot before the dark gray wall of Film Enterprises. As he shouldered his way through the crowd, Delaney welcomed the sound of police sirens converging on the scene.

Mavis was face down on the sidewalk, a crumpled figure in a multicolored dirndl and a peasant blouse no longer white. Kneeling, Delaney pressed her throat, then the wrist of her outflung arm, seeking a pulse no longer there. Mavis was dead, and he swore bitterly.

Delaney looked up as a police car slid to a stop, its siren moaning through a descending scale. Before he could rise, a uniformed policeman broke through the ring of white and silent faces. The officer's face was grim and the .38 special in his hand was leveled at Delaney. He snapped:

"Put the gun on the pavement. Stand up and clasp your hands behind your head."

Surprised, Delaney realized his hand still held his gun. He laid it carefully on the sidewalk and rising to his feet, clasped his hands as directed.

Another police car slid to a stop. its uniformed officers breaking up the crowd, pressing the people back from the principals in the shooting. A black Ford sedan pulled over to the curb with four men in it. Only the driver wore a uniform, and he remained behind the wheel when the others got out.

A slight, gray haired man with lean, hawk-like features paused at the side of the car while his eyes

surveyed the scene. Then he crossed to Delaney and said: "You can put your arms down. I'm Lieutenant Davis, homicide."

Lieutenant Davis accompanied Delaney to his office after the questioning at the Hollywood Precinct Station. There was little in the office the Lieutenant missed before he settled into a chair and lit a cigarette. He looked at Delaney and said:

"Okay. That was quite a story you told over at headquarters. Now let's have the rest of the story. Let's have the real reason you were on Cahuenga this morning."

Delaney grinned, then his face sobered and he leaned forward in his chair. Quickly he outlined his activities and what he had learned. He gave the address in Sawtelle. He described Gladys and told of his interview with her, as well as that with the drunken housekeeper. He told how Kostka and Ziggy had worked him over and wrecked his office. He told what happened in the Can-Can Club. He identified himself as the intended victim in the donneybrook at the gas station in Sawtelle.

"I wasn't parked on Cahuenga by accident when the shooting started. I was staked out in my car waiting for Mavis to show," Delaney concluded.

Lieutenant Davis swore softly and his face was hard. "You're still holding something back."

"I am—?" Delaney waited expectantly.

"You're no boy scout. Who's your client? What's his angle?"

"He's a she," Delaney settled back in his chair. "I have a right to protect her interest, but I'm going to give you her name: Eunice Blair. I'm expecting her here this afternoon."

Delaney described Eunice's visit and how she had retained him to find Mavis. He gave the background on Mavis as Eunice had given it to him. He finished:

"I have only one favor to ask. Eunice is young and alone here in Los Angeles. This is going to be rough. Let me break the news to her."

"Okay," Lieutenant Davis shrugged and looked at his watch.

It was after two when Eunice walked in. Delaney rose to greet her. As Eunice settled into a chair, he said, "Miss Blair, this is Lieutenant Davis of the Los Angeles Police."

"Police—?" Eunice's face went white and her fingers fumbled with the clasp on her large leather bag.

"But I—I told you—" she faltered, her eyes wide with distress.

"Yes, I know," Delaney said quickly, "and I didn't call them in." He hesitated, then cleared his throat. "Eunice, I have some bad news for you. I want you to be—"

"You've found her? You've

found Mavis and something's happened?" Eunice interrupted in a small voice.

Delaney nodded. "I saw Mavis this morning. But—"

"You *saw* her? She's hurt?" Eunice started from her chair.

Delaney said slowly, "Mavis is dead. She was killed. I saw it happen and couldn't prevent it."

"Oh no. *Oh, no!*" Eunice whispered, shaking her head and sinking back into her chair. Her face was chalk-white and her hand moved into her bag. It came out with a piece of Kleenex which she mechanically shredded in her lap without being aware of what she was doing.

Lieutenant Davis said gruffly, but not unkindly: "You should have come to us, Miss Blair. But if it's any comfort to you, we've got the man who killed her. His conviction is open and shut."

"No, it isn't," Delaney said evenly.

"What the hell do you mean?" Lieutenant Davis demanded.

Delaney's eyes narrowed and he was tense in his chair.

"The guy didn't kill Mavis. She was already going down when he shot. Have you had the medical examiner's report yet?"

"Not yet," Lieutenant Davis admitted, slack jawed with amazement. "But what's the—?"

Delaney interrupted harshly. "Oh the gunsel scored from the car all right. But I'm betting the medic's report will show death resulted from a shot fired *into her back!*"

Lieutenant Davis glared at Delaney and banged his fist on the desk. "Are you out of your mind? Do you *know* who killed her?"

"You're damn right I do!" Delaney came out of his chair like a steel spring uncoiling and dove across his desk.

Eunice screamed and grabbed her large leather bag, but Delaney savagely twisted her wrist and she let go. She sprang to her feet, clawing for his face and trying to fight her way free. Delaney slammed her back into the chair and dropped her bag into the Lieutenant's lap.

Lieutenant Davis dipped into her bag and came up with a snubnosed .25 caliber automatic. For a moment he stared at the gun incredulously, then his eyes went to Eunice. He turned back to Delaney.

"You mean—?"

"That's the gun. It's got to be," Delaney said grimly.

Eunice gasped and her face was mottled. Her eyes strained behind her glasses and darted from Delaney, to Lieutenant Davis, to the door. She moved her feet as though to spring from the chair again, but a look from Lieutenant Davis stopped her.

Delaney lit a cigarette.

Lieutenant Davis had a speculative look on his lean, hawk-like face as he considered Delaney's words. He challenged:

"Okay—how did she get to Mavis?"

"Me. I was the bird dog," Delaney's voice was charged with disgust. "Yesterday, I told Eunice I expected to *contact* Mavis. But I didn't say where. Eunice must have followed me from my office. That gave her the location of Film Enterprises. The fact I spent the afternoon there, staked out in my car, told her that was where I expected to meet Mavis.

"This morning Eunice hid in the passageway between Film Enterprises and the vacant building next to it. I think she saw the two men in the car. She couldn't know who they were gunning for—Mavis or me. But she didn't care. When she saw the gun in the window of the car, she let Mavis have it—in the back. Her shot was unnoticed, or unremembered, in the shooting which followed.

"It's a lie!" Eunice hissed through clenched teeth, straining forward in her chair, her face livid.

"Is it?" Delaney looked at her coldly. Then he asked slowly: "Did you remember to pick up the empty cartridge ejected from your gun?"

Lieutenant Davis led Eunice to the door, his hand around her arm. Then he stopped and turned. "But the motive—?"

"Money. Lots of money," Delaney sighed. "Money Mavis didn't even know she had. Jim Kennedy left it all to Mavis when he died. Only Mavis didn't know that—didn't know he was dead. But this greedy little bitch beside you knew. And she knew, as next of kin, she and her mother would inherit if something happened to Mavis."

As the door closed behind Lieutenant Davis and Eunice, Delaney muttered bitterly:

"Yeah—mother will be so worried."

LAST PAYMENT

Most newspaper men drink a little. Jim drank more than most . . . but then he had good reason.

BY

RON BORING

JIM HAD been expecting it all week. But when his notice of dismissal came that morning it caught him off balance. He hadn't realized that it showed that much.

The clock at the far end of the newsroom told him that he had another hour left in his shift. The last shift. He bent over his typewriter and dug into the last summary. He hoped that Alec, the senior editor and desk man, would let him go early. It was the least he could do.

Otherwise, Jim thought, he wouldn't be able to get downtown to make the payment before the store closed. Then there would be the weekend, and by the time Monday came around, he knew he wouldn't have enough money.

He slapped the first half dozen pages down in front of Alec; Alec took them automatically, without looking up. He had been checking news copy for almost thirty years. Methodically, his tired eyes swept up and down the yellow pages, his right hand correcting a comma here, a typo there. Jim went back to his own desk.

Alec finished up his little pile of copy, with a continuous motion placing page after page in front of the teletype operator.

CLACK CLACK DING CLAC CLAAC . . .

And all across the country, his

stories came up on similar teletype machines in every private radio station. Every hour another fifteen hundred words, to be ripped from the machines by breathlessly running copy boys and spread in front of editors and announcers. So goes the news of a turbulent world, he thought.

Jim finished up and threw the remaining sheets in front of the older man.

"Leaving early tonight, do you mind?" he forced civility into his voice.

"Can't see what difference it makes," Alec replied, still glaring at the copy. "This the best you can do?" he asked, referring to the UN piece.

"Do you want me to go out and make the news too?" he said.

"See you sometime, Jim," said Alec with the small smile of a man who has had his revenge.

"Yeah," Jim said, getting his coat from the rack. He walked through the room to the door. No one looked at him directly. But as he passed each man he could feel his eyes on him. Word gets around fast in a news office.

He wasn't embarrassed. He had been through the same thing four times since the beginning of the year. This was the shortest tenure yet, not quite five weeks. He had better learn to watch himself from now on, he thought. He took the stairs three at a time.

The notice had come that morning with his pay. Not much warning. Too bad the place wasn't unionized, he thought. Maybe then he could have raised a little hell.

He stepped into the street. The setting sun made him squint. He pulled his Spring-and-Fall closer about him and strode to the street-car stop.

He glanced at his watch and saw with relief that he would miss the rush hour. It was the last payment he would have to make and it was now or never. He knew what would happen to the money unless he made use of it now.

He waited with the handful of workers at the corner. He wondered what he would do. There was always a chance of getting a temporary job with UPI, that is, until word got around that he had been canned again. But it would be a couple of weeks' pin money.

But what would Marie think? She had been very patient, but he winced at the thought of hurting her again. He didn't imagine she could take it much longer.

The street-car was slow in coming, and he began to fidget. The tentacles of that familiar hunger crawled through his body and he tried to put it down. He had to control himself. He looked at the people around him. Strange people, he thought . . . jobs, lunch pails . . . loves . .

Again, the hunger. More urgent this time. Again he clenched his fists in his pockets.

Alec hadn't said a thing to him all week. He just sat and spied and informed on him. It wasn't as though he hadn't done his job, he told himself. It was just that Alec couldn't stand people doing what they wanted. What bothered him most, apart from the effect it would have on Marie, was the total indifference of his so-called friends. You'd think it was the most natural thing in the world to be fired for being a drunk.

He began to sweat. He needed a drink. He stepped aboard the streetcar, went to the rear and slumped down.

He thought about the job and how he lost it, and the three before it. Hell, he thought, drinking was almost a prerequisite in the news business. Even Alec was known to take a drink now and then. What are a few drinks between friends?

It must have been the black-list, he concluded. Not overt, but spread slowly by word of mouth, over poker, over drinks. He was not liked and must be kept on the merry-go-round.

The streets sped by. He took out his wallet and counted his money. Forty-three dollars, after taxes. Well, he hadn't lost much. He realized that he had come to his stop and lept for the bell rope. He got off and went into the small jewelry store near the corner.

It was a second rate place by any standard. He knew when he first bought the ring that he had been bilked. But he didn't care. It looked pretty on Marie's finger, and she seemed to think the whole world had been imprisoned in that tiny, gleaming chunk of glass. She had been happy, and so had he.

He was happiest when he was paying for it. Every month for over two years he had taken his thirty-six dollars to the tiny shop, chatted with the old man behind the counter, and checked the dwindling balance.

He suddenly became a little sad when he realized that this was to be the last payment. He had come to look upon the old man as a benefactor, someone he could share his happiness with. And paying had been one way of showing his love for Marie.

"Today's the day, eh?" the old man cackled, opening the account book.

Jim had the right change clenched in his fist, and he spread the meagre bills one by one on the counter.

The old man counted the money and made an entry into the musty old ledger. Then, with a minutely magnificent gesture, he crossed out the account. Then he handed the card over to Jim.

"Here. The honour of ripping it to shreds," he said, smiling.

Jim started. "No. I—I'd like to keep it," he said blushing, and thrust the tattered card into his coat pocket. Just a reminder of two years of diligence.

"How's the girl?" the old man asked, his eyes laughing.

"Getting along fine. I guess this'll be the last time I'll be seeing you," he answered. He was reluctant to leave.

"You'll be buying an anniversary gift before long. I'll save something for you . . . nice . . . not too expensive."

Jim waved good-bye and went out the door. He didn't look back. It was too early to go home to Marie. And he needed time to think of a reasonable excuse for again being out of a job.

He walked south, looking at the receipt the old man had given him. The word PAID was scrawled in large red letters over it. He put this, along with the card, tenderly into his wallet.

At least it wouldn't be all bad news, he told himself. She'd be happy to know that at last the ring would be her own, and no one could take it from her. But what would she say about the job? He had promised again and again that he wouldn't drink. But she must have known that it would be a hard promise to keep. He wondered how much longer she could love a man like himself, who couldn't even hold a forty-three-dollar job . . . a man who couldn't control a simple thing like drink.

He sat at his usual spot, and the waiter dropped a glass of beer without waiting to be asked.

He shuddered at the first taste of the cold, bitter liquid, then sat back in the gloom of the seedy men's room. The first glass went down badly, but swiftly, and he felt better after a couple more.

He had roughly six dollars left. More than enough to get a glow on with beer at fifteen cents a glass, not counting tips. He never drank anything but beer.

He lit a cigaret and blew a smoke ring. It spread out in front of him over the black, wet table. Then someone opened a door and the draught exploded it. He let the lighter remain lit for a moment then blew it out. The top was hot with the flame and he relished the feel of it.

Someone was talking about astrology in a loud voice.

He knew that Marie would be very angry that he was drinking the last of the money. He would need it for food, car fare, and clean shirts when he would have to look for a job.

Marie loved him now, he knew that. But for how long? He ordered another drink and began talking to himself out loud.

"Shaddup!" someone said.

He went to the washroom and doused his face with cold water. He felt better. His reflection in the mirror glared redly back at him. He cursed himself, then followed it up with a sly smile and went back for more beer.

An old man was sitting at the table he had just left. He was an-

noyed, but sat down anyway, putting his change on the table. The old man looked at the heap of silver acquisitively, then went back to his dreams.

He had met Marie three years before, and loved her from the first moment they had met. Marie didn't take to him at first. He was far too moody, she said. But after a time she became accustomed to his shifting tempers and erratic habits. And he didn't drink then.

He finally got the nerve to propose to her. She accepted, not too readily, but life took on a new meaning for him. He got a job with a small newspaper, bought a ring, got a job with a bigger paper, and things were just dandy.

Then he began to drink and talk to himself.

He was thrusting a finger at an imaginary Alec when he toppled a full glass of beer over the old man. The waiter came over and wiped up after him. The old man left, cursing him through toothless gums. He ordered another round, and found that he could just pay for it, with two dollars to spare. That would be for the cab. He was in no condition to walk very far, and street-car drivers can be sticky sometimes.

The waiter looked closely at him, decided that he had had too much to drink, and threw him out into the street. Jim fell and bruised his knee, but he couldn't feel the pain. He picked himself up slowly and walked toward the cab stand.

He felt strong enough now to have it out with Marie. It was only when he was completely drunk that he could talk to her about things that really troubled him.

The cab driver was apprehensive, but took him in without asking him beforehand how much money he had.

He shuddered a little as he went through the front door. The house was dark, except for a light in the upstairs hall. He looked at his watch. Marie would still be up. He tip-toed up the red-carpeted stairway to her room. He hesitated, his heart pounding, opened the door and went in to the room.

It was dark.

"Marie . . ." he said quietly.

There was a shuffling sound from the bed.

"Don't say anything, Marie . . . I'm sorry," he said as he searched for the light.

He wondered how he would break it to her. His hand closed around the account card in his pocket.

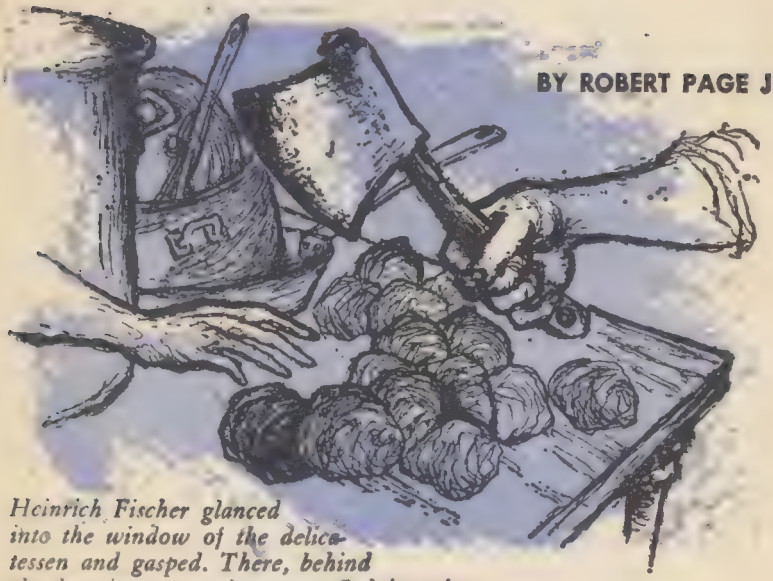
"I've done it, Marie . . ." he said joyfully. "I've made the last payment!"

"Get him out of here, for god's sake," a man's voice said.

Jim's heart sank. She was at it again, he thought, and turned for the door.

"Come back in an hour, Jimmy," she was saying as he went out.

VENGEANCE



BY ROBERT PAGE JONES

Heinrich Fischer glanced into the window of the delicatessen and gasped. There, behind the hanging rows of meat-stuffed intestines and sausage, like prison bars, appeared a face. Bloated, smooth, full-lipped, innocent looking . . . it was Haller.

He was a man distinguished only by his plainness, thin almost to emaciation, jostled along by the last-minute stampede of Christmas shoppers. Stringy arms clutched a battered, handleless violin case against his chest. He came up out of the subway in the West Side tenement section. It was snowing. It had been snowing all day and the slush was heaped in dirty mounds on the pavement.

In the middle of a long block he stopped, waited for a break in the traffic, and crossed. He hissed at a growling dog that darted out to snap at his heels. He did not like dogs. They were vile things that ate perfectly good food without so much as a snicker of appreciation.

He stared down at the pounded slush as he walked, chin thrust for-

ward, shoulders stooped from too many years of sleeping in a cramped wooden cubicle. In front of *Liebermann's Delicatessen and Grocery* he stopped again. He stood on the patch of wet sidewalk under the awning where the snow hadn't reached and examined the merchandise in the window. It was a ritual with him. He had stopped in front of *Liebermann's* on nearly every week-night for the past fifteen years. Tonight there was a new display; shiny tins of potted meat and Christmas cakes from the Old Country. He thought briefly about buying one of the tins of meat but changed his mind. The price, scribbled on a sign atop the pyramid Liebermann had painstakingly built in the window, was exorbitant. There was no money to spare. It was always this way at Christmas. Nobody wanted music lessons. After the holidays, when the children had new instruments, things would be better.

He stamped the loose snow from his shoes. Perhaps some sausage. He could afford that. His gaze shifted to the rows of meat-stuffed intestines hung from bloody hooks in the ceiling. Something happened. In his mind the sausages suddenly became metal bars, partially obscuring a bloated face, smooth and perspiring with a full-lipped pink mouth, innocent looking, smiling.

He felt a cold twist in his heart. A quick squeeze. He did not understand. The hated image had never come on him in just this way. Never so suddenly. He closed his eyes.

It was Haller's face.

The image, like a searing knife-blade in the brain, branded there the washed-out blue eyes and mocking smile and sensuous lips. For a moment he stood there, fighting the rising tide of hate that for so long had eaten away at his mind, blotting out everything else. Things would be different if he could forget. But he could not. He swallowed, his mind burning as the familiar features wavered and changed shape before him, becoming a series of jagged slashes inflicted by an imaginary knife until the red gore ran together into one sickly wound that trickled blood down inside his pounding chest.

A man lurched out of the doorway, jostled him, his galoshes leaving a trail of dark pockmarks as he trudged off through the snow. The thin man opened his eyes. He blinked. The image was gone, replaced by the reflection of his own vacant face, the weak chin and thin lips a pale smear against the dark upturned collar of his coat. He stared at the reflection, feeling sorry for himself. The odor of fresh-baked bread lingered in his nostrils. He hugged the violin case closer to his chest, sneezed, dropped his gaze to the fingerless left hand protruding from a threadbare sleeve.

With a barely discernable shrug, he turned, choking back the bitterness in him as he trudged two more blocks on Sixth Street to his room.

His name was Heinrich Fischer. He was born in Germany in the early twenties, a remarkably-gifted child, who at the age of seven was studying music under his Jewish father at the Akademie *in Munich. At eleven he played before royalty at the Opera House in Salzburg. It was the following year that the pogroms started. Heinrich's parents were put into a concentration camp, but they managed to leave him with friends who still had some influence with the Nazis. He stayed on at the* Akademie, *even after he heard that his father and mother were dead, until one day they came for him too. He was sent to a camp a few miles outside of Munich where he miraculously survived the war. But his health was broken. Afterwards, he wrote to friends who had escaped to America before the war. They helped him get to New York where he was able to make a meager living teaching young people to play the violin.*

It was on Thursday, three days later, that Fischer saw the face clearly again. The snow had changed to a chilling rain. He stood under the faded canopy in front of *Liebermann's,* peering silently into the dimly-lighted window, like a bundle of wetwash waiting to be spun dry. Today it was smoked herring, spilling out of a wicker basket into the window, and at a price!

He was about to go inside and buy one of the fish, when he saw the face, bobbing back and forth behind the sausages like a demented child's painted balloon. Something in his stomach went suddenly berserk. His throat went dry. He knew this time that the face was no terrible invention of his tortured mind. It was impossible—but he saw the face with his own eyes. His eyes did not lie.

He moved closer to the grimy window. There was no mistake. The face belonged to Erich Haller, the man he hated more than the stench of death.

It was too good to be true. Haller! Here! In America!

For a moment he could not move. He just stood there, his heart sending a pounding rush of blood through his system, uncertain of what he should do. He sidestepped awkwardly as Haller came out of the store, pudgy arms struggling with brown-wrapped packages. Their eyes met, and for an instant Fischer thought that he saw a flicker of recognition in the other's gaze, but he was not sure.

Lurching crazily, like a man with too much whiskey in him, he hurried into the store. The end of the violin case caught a stack

of cereal boxes, nearly toppling them.

"That man—" he said coarsely. His tongue flopped.

"Heinrich!" Liebermann's greeting was husky and warm. He stopped what he was doing and wiped big hands on a soiled apron. "You saw the herring, eh? You know, you're my best customer for herring, Heinrich. Every time there is herring I know you will come into the store to buy some. For you, I have saved a nice prize. A beautiful fish, believe me. And such a price, eh?"

"That man." Fischer repeated the words, his eyes wide, his mouth working. "Don't you know who that is?"

"What man, Heinrich?" He looked puzzled.

"The one who was just here," Fischer shouted. "I tell you, I saw him with my own eyes."

"Of course." Liebermann looked at him peculiarly. "His name is Schulze. Karl Schulze. He is just over from the Old Country."

"Schulze? He told you his name is Schulze?"

"Yes. Why should he tell me anything else?" Liebermann got out the herring, tore off a piece of brown wrapping paper, put the fish on it. "Don't tell me you know Schulze from the Old Country. It's a small world, eh, Heinrich?"

"Yes. Yes. A small world." His voice rose. He felt a little ill. "Quickly. Tell me where he lives."

"Schulze?"

"Haller! I tell you, his name is Haller." He held his fingerless left hand for Liebermann to see. "I could never forget the man who did this to me."

Liebermann looked at him. "Perhaps he only looks like the man. It's been a long time, Heinrich. People change. Tell me—have you ever seen such a herring, eh?"

Fool. Fischer did not wait to argue. He ran back out onto the street. The rain was coming down. There were not many people. He saw Haller crossing the street at the end of the block. He hurried after him. He had been a fool to waste time talking with Liebermann. Because of the stupid delay, Haller might disappear again from the face of the earth, just as he had disappeared during those frenzied days following the war.

Fischer quickened his pace, vaguely conscious of the rough brick fronts of the buildings sliding past, his feet making crunching sounds in the snow. The slush had become icy. His breath came in short gasps. There was a wild thumping in his chest and he knew that the pain there was caused by the cold air rushing into his lungs. He suddenly lost sight of Haller's broad back as a bus spewed people onto the sidewalk between them. He lunged forward, bumping a woman carrying an umbrella, ignored her exclamation of disgust.

He broke through the crowd,

scanning the sidewalk ahead through burning eyes. He stopped. He was in the middle of a long block. He squeezed his eyes shut and opened them again, feeling himself slipping into a delirium of hopelessness.

There was no sign of life along the street.

He stood there, the rain falling on him. He was dimly aware of the wetness. He thought, *can this be some terrible trick of my mind? Is it possible? No! It is him. I know it. He has only gone into one of the buildings.*

He shuffled quickly past the clouded store fronts—a cleaners with the word CLOSED FOR XMAS soap-smeared across grimy glass, greasy spoon cafes, a barber shop with empty chairs—seeing nothing. At the corner, he paused, getting his bearings. He was about to continue up Sixth Street when he spotted Haller, hanging close to the cheap apartment buildings on Trimble Street, pressing in out of the rain.

"Erich Haller. Stop! *Butcher!*" His voice was little more than a womanish screech, unintelligible. He turned the corner, staggered rubber-kneed along Trimble Street, narrowing the gap between them.

He was about to call again, when suddenly Haller dropped to one knee, as if struck by a bullet. Fischer squeezed his eyes again. They did not seem to focus right. He saw Haller pick up an object from the sidewalk, one of the packages probably, and disappear through the entrance to a rundown brick house near the end of the block.

When Fischer reached the spot, he paused at the bottom of a short flight of steps. A cardboard sign tacked to one of the pillars supporting the delapidated porch said FURNISHED ROOMS. His knees nearly buckled as he climbed the steps. He tried the door. It was locked. A faded Christmas wreath hung there from a nail. Frantically, he pounded against the frosted-glass panel in the door, a soundless scream building in his throat.

There was the sound of a chain being slid into place and he felt a shudder go through him. He stepped back a pace. He wondered what Haller would do when they suddenly came face to face.

The door opened. It stretched taut the length of chain, leaving an opening five or six inches wide. A woman's face appeared at the opening. The skin on her face looked like a thin layer of wax. She was shoddy and cheap. There was a patch of rouge on each cheek. She looked at him suspiciously through slitted eyes. "You trying to break the glass?"

"Haller," Fischer said breathlessly. "You will only get into trouble if you hide him. I saw—"

"What do you want?"

"Erich Haller. I told you. I know he is here."

The face became frightened. She

tried to look past him. "There's some mistake. There's no Haller here."

"You're lying! Why do you lie?"

"Please," she said nervously. "If you don't go away I'll have to call the police."

"Liar!" With his right hand he reached for her throat, cursing, a horrible tremor in his voice. He was nearly blind with passion and fury. *"Liar! Liar! Liar!"*

She tried to close the door with his arm still in the opening, pinning him there, sending pain reverberating into his system. He wondered if the bone had been broken. With a sudden jerk, he pulled the arm free, felt the sting of tearing flesh. The door closed. He thought how odd it was that a ribbon hanging from the wreath had the words *Seasons Greetings.* His thumb was cut. Blood dripped in small drops onto the porch.

He stood there, staring intently at the door, his face vacant. He perspired. His head ached.

"Crazy. *Crazy!*" The woman's high-pitched scream came clearly through the frosted glass. "I'll call the police."

The police. Of course. This was America. In America, he could go to the police for help.

Hurriedly, Fischer left the porch and walked one block back to Sixth Street where he found the beat cop, a smiling, heavy-shouldered young man with a wide jaw faintly corded with muscle, standing under a canopy out of the rain.

"Come with me," Fischer said, gesturing. "Hurry."

"What was that?"

"Why do you stand there?" Fischer said, the words tumbling from quivering lips. "You must come with me. I will show you where a criminal is hiding."

"Criminal?" The smile faded from the policeman's face, his eyes darkened. "What criminal? What did he do?"

"His name is Erich Haller."

"Haller?"

"Yes. At first I thought he was some trick my mind was playing. But I followed him. You'll see."

"Slow down, buddy. You ain't making much sense." The policeman's eyes shifted, watched a drop of Fischer's blood splatter on the sidewalk. He became conscious of the chill in the air. The policeman had seen a lot of things, terrible things, but that single drop of blood made him shiver. He said, "Maybe we'd better go down to headquarters. They'll want to hear about this Haller guy."

Fischer's face changed. "There's no time for that."

"There's time." The policeman looked at him piercingly.

"No!" Fischer backed away. "You don't believe me."

"Sure I believe you." He smiled. "Come on, now."

Fischer could think of only one thing to do. He moved suddenly, lowering the violin case like a bat-

tering ram, slammed it into the policeman's groin. The policeman groaned, stared at him as if dazed, fell foward on his knees. He ran, swung down a side street, knees thumping hollowly against the violin case clutched awkwardly against his chest. Sweat stung his eyes and he could not get enough air into his lungs. He came to another corner and tried to make the turn too fast. He went down, slamming heavily against the packed snow. The violin case slithered out in front of him. Grit ripped into the flesh of his palm and he stifled a cry as a sharp object wrenched at his knee. He rolled against one shoulder to stop his forward momentum, came to his feet, stumbled against a wall. He picked up the violin case, forcing his weight on the leg with the hurt knee, and almost went down again.

A man detached himself from the shadows of a doorway and came toward him. "You okay, buddy?"

"Yes. Thank you." He brushed the snow from his coat, glancing behind him.

The subway entrance was just a few steps ahead of him. He would be safe there. He fumbled through his pockets at the ticket booth, grabbed his change as a train thundered into the station, fell in with the jostling crowd that poured through the turnstile. When he glanced over his shoulder he felt a quick squeeze in his heart. The policeman stood at the turnstile. Finally he was inside the car. He took a seat near the window. He could see the policeman, running toward him. *Why don't the doors close,* he thought. *What are they waiting for? Everyone is ready. Everyone is sitting here. Why don't they close?*

He shut his eyes. When he opened them again, the train was moving. The car was crowded and most of the seats were occupied. A young girl sat opposite him. She had blue eyes and long, yellow hair.

She put out a small hand and said graciously, "Is that your violin?"

"Yes."

"Will you play it for me?"

"No. I used to play. Now I only teach young people to play—like you."

"Will you teach me to play?"

"It is very difficult."

"I would work very hard."

"Would you?"

"Oh, yes." She clapped the tiny hands together.

"Then I will teach you." He wrote his address on a scrap of paper and gave it to her. "Here. Tell your mother that you are going to become a great virtuoso on the violin."

The train came out onto an elevated. As he looked into the blue eyes, a scene long lost of some happier time in his boyhood flashed across his mind, vanished as the train lurched to a stop. People came

into the car. Rain slashed against the windows. He put his head back. The trembling in his chest had stopped. He relaxed. There no longer was any element of doubt in his mind. Now he knew. He could kill a man. There was a look of sadness on his face. He looked out of the window, thinking how odd it was that it should be raining now.

During Fischer's third year at the camp, on the morning of the first seasonal rain, he had been dragged from his damp cubicle and sent to the cookhouse. Normally the work of cleaning pots and pans was done out of doors, in the prison compound, but because of the rain Fischer was allowed inside. He worked next to a table where Haller, the fat Nazi cook, stood dicing potatoes and tossing them into a watery slop. Fischer's eyes took in the small pieces of batter that clung like snails to the damp table legs. A shudder ran through him. Perhaps it was the rain, but he knew that the day would be a long one. He wondered what game he might play to occupy his mind, to help pass the time, and his eyes went to the mound of potatoes. Of course! He would steal one. Not that he would actually take one of the potatoes—the risk was absurd—but, if he put himself on a rigid schedule, he might spend the remainder of the day planning such an offense. The important thing was that he devise a game to occupy his mind. Lethargy was a luxury that could destroy him, turning his brain into a spongy waste. He began to plan. Rank, greasy water was splashed over the front of his shirt, and soon he would exude a sour odor. If he were able to slip one of the potatoes into his shirt, a cursory search by the guards might fail to detect it. The plan had a certain amount of appeal. Its daring amused him. By noon the thought had risen in his mind, dashing out of control, until he realized that he would actually test its soundness. His brain had become fogged with the enormity of what he was about to do. He waited until Haller's back was turned. Then, carefully, he inched his left hand toward the table. His fingers closed around a gritty potato. It was done! He was about to snatch the prize away when he felt Haller's knife crush through his knuckles. He screamed. The crack of bone came to him like the familiar sound of snapping violin strings. After what seemed like a long time, he got to his feet and stumbled dazedly out of the cookhouse into the prison compound, the sound of Haller's oily chuckle ringing in his ears.

Fischer walked along slowly. He had been walking aimlessly for an hour. Down one street, across at the intersection, up the next street. There was still plenty of time. He carried the violin case and a small

package of liverwurst, a special treat, he had purchased at *Liebermann's.*

At exactly four forty-five he turned onto Trimble Street. He was only vaguely aware of the cab that cruised slowly past him looking for a fare, of an old man with newspapers under his arm, of a cat that watched him from the warmth of a porch chair. He stopped a few yards down from the familiar brownstone and looked around him wearily. The rain had stopped during the night, but it was colder now, and the snow had frozen into ice underfoot.

He pulled the threadbare collar around his throat. In a few moments, he knew, a green-and-white car would turn the corner and come toward him down the street. He knew because he had made his plans carefully. After the first full shock of deciding to snuff out a life had passed, after the sweating and the momentary panic were gone, there remained only the work to be done. It was unpleasant work. There were tedious details to be attended to. The hours of standing in chilly doorways as he observed the comings and goings of the people who lived in the brownstone on Trimble Street. The purchase at the hardware store. The stop at *Liebermann's.*

He began walking again as the green-and-white car passed him and pulled to the curb in front of the brownstone. A girl got out and ran up the steps to the porch. He followed her slowly, gripping the railing, stood stamping the wet snow from his shoes as she fitted her key in the lock. He coughed. The wreath with the words *Seasons Greetings* was still on the door. He began humming to himself, tunelessly, waiting.

The girl seemed to be having difficulty with the lock.

"Here. Let me," he said, putting the violin case at his feet. He opened the door, stood back and motioned for her to preceed him, a smile on his face.

"Thank you," she said. She went inside and he heard the sound of her small feet on the stairs.

Inside it was very dim and cold. There was not much air. He squinted at a row of names under the dusty mailboxes in the hall. Brown. Mulhern. *Schulze!* His feet moved noiselessly over the worn carpet that ran down the hall to the flight of rickety stairs. He took the stairs slowly, right hand on the railing, with only the sound of the floorboards creaking under his weight.

Haller's apartment was in the front, overlooking the street. The lock was no problem. He had learned about locks in the concentration camp. There was only one room. It was small, cramped; the walls squeezing in like a giant vice. For a moment Fischer felt like turning and running out. He thought how odd it was that the

pitiful, fishy-smelling cubicle was so much like the pitiful, fishy-smelling cubicles of the concentration camp.

Fischer pulled back the curtain that draped the window. The curtain rings made a whining noise. A fly started across one of the panes of glass, hesitated, as if it were not sure of where it wanted to go. Fischer watched the fly, listening to the sound of the traffic in the street. He closed his eyes and the familiar image came to him clearly. He wondered what Haller would do when he returned home to find this skeleton in his room. Smiling, he placed the tip of one finger over the fly and pressed it against the glass.

He was still standing there, when he saw Haller down the street, a lopsided figure, one shoulder down, hurrying along toward the brownstone. Fischer wondered if Haller had come to America to accept a job as a cook. Perhaps he was the chef at one of the big downtown hotels.

He slid the curtains closed, casting deep shadows in the room, and fished the potato from the pocket of his coat. It was not a very large potato. He had wanted a bigger one, round and temptingly fat, but it would do; besides, Liebermann had thrown it in with the liverwurst, free of charge.

Quickly, he unfastened the clasps on the violin case, and removed the heavy, flat-honed meat chopper he had purchased at the hardware store. He put the package of liverwurst in the violin case and slid the case beneath the bed. He placed the potato carefully in the center of the sagging, wooden-topped dresser, opened the door to the closet and slipped behind it just as Haller came into the room.

From his hiding place he could see the potato clearly, illuminated by a soft shaft of light from the hall, no more than an arm's length away.

Haller did not close the door. He seemed to be standing still. Fischer could almost place him by the rasp of the other man's breathing. He knew somehow that Haller was staring at the potato, puzzled, perhaps disturbed by some half-forgotten recollection.

Fischer wanted to cough, but he did not, sucking air into his mouth and down into his pounding chest. He wondered how long it would be before Haller's curiosity made him reach for the potato. He raised the chopper slowly over his head. There was a faint crinkling of the flesh around his eyes and the corners of his mouth pulled into the beginnings of a smile.

BODY-SNATCHER

BY
C. B. GILFORD

"Anton," Mrs. Kopping said. "I want to reward you for your years of faithful service." Then she told him where she'd hidden his wife's body.

Anton Vandrak groveled in the dirt, literally and figuratively. And he cursed the day and the hour and the woman that had brought him to this place.

He halted his toil, sitting back on his heels, resting his agonied back, wiping perspiration from his face with both grimy sleeves. He surveyed his handiwork, not with pride, only with hatred and bitterness.

"I want a rose-bordered driveway," Mrs. Harriet Kopping had decreed. "All the way from the gate, right up to the verandah, and around the circle. And all red roses, mind you, Anton. I want a solid wall of red roses on both sides of the drive. I'm going to give my house a new name, Rose Hill."

He had groaned inwardly when he'd received the command. It was almost three hundred feet from the front gate at the street up to the house. Adding the keyhole circle, and figuring the bushes at four feet apart, it meant a hundred and sixty plants. A hundred and sixty holes to dig!

But he hadn't grumbled aloud to Mrs. Kopping. He'd saved his resentment for Stella, when they were alone together in their apartment behind the kitchen area.

"A hundred and sixty holes to dig!" he'd shrieked at her.

"Sh!" Stella had said. "Mrs. Kopping will hear you."

"Well, let her hear me."

"Do you want to lose us our jobs?"

"Yes, I'd like to lose this job of mine, or it'll be the death of me."

Stella had turned on him then,

with the kind of quick fury she could manage so easily. "Now don't start complaining about your back. When I have this whole house to care for, and the cooking besides, and when all you have to do is to keep the outside neat. . ."

"Nine acres!"

"When you were farming, you had eighty."

"I was a young man then."

"But you had an old back right from the beginning. It was your poor suffering back that lost us the farm. Well, it won't lose us this job. Now get your lazy carcass out there and dig."

He had obeyed her, because at the time he had been able to think of no other alternative. He had gone out in the fresh dew of the morning with spade and fork. The truck from the nursery met him and deposited forty rose bushes, balled and sacked and ready for planting, on the lawn.

"I've ordered forty delivered each morning for four mornings," Mrs. Kopping had said. "I expect you to complete the job in four days, Anton."

And now it was the end of the first day. And more than a fourth of the job was finished. He'd not only dug forty holes, but he'd cultivated the earth so that now, along the whole left side of the drive, was a neat strip of freshly turned soil. For a hundred and sixty feet of that strip, and regularly at four-foot intervals beginning at the gate, the bare, thorny stumps of young rose bushes jutted out of their newly dug bed.

But his poor back was on fire. Punished muscles and nerves were in open, savage rebellion. As he struggled to rise from his knees, to straighten his curving spine, fresh waves of pain engulfed him with each movement. But because he wanted to walk, rather than crawl, he persisted till he got himself erect. And then the sweat on his brow was the cold kind, clammy, chilling, unpleasant, unlike the honest sweat of toil.

He began trudging up the drive past the already long line of bushes. And looking up, he saw what he knew he would see—Mrs. Kopping, sitting at a window watching him.

He had expected to see her there, because she almost always watched him, changing windows as he went from one side of the house to the other, or from front to back. She spent some time, of course, overseeing the management of the interior of the big white house. But she never read or watched television. She was just one of those old women whose greatest pleasure seems to come from looking out of windows. And her eyes were sharp. Anton Vandrak knew that she had personally checked his procedure on every one of those forty rose bushes.

Now as he looked up to meet her gaze, he saw her white head

nod. That meant approval. He had done well, she was telling him. He could keep his job therefore, and for the next three days he could perform just exactly as he had performed today!

Curse her, he thought, and he lowered his eyes so that she might not detect the hatred in his face. Curse her! I don't believe she is interested in roses or any of the other things I plant, or water, or trim. She's interested only in having some human being cavorting out here for her entertainment and pleasure, doing something not because it needs to be done, but simply because she has ordered it done.

He hurried as fast as he could to get out of her sight. When he reached their quarters, Stella wasn't there. She'd be putting Mrs. Kopping's dinner on the table, so the mistress of the house could dine precisely at six. It didn't matter when the people who'd actually been working got fed.

But this night he wouldn't bother to complain. He was too weary, too full of pains, to want to eat anyway. He stretched wearily on his bed. I am tired, he thought, and will need to sleep tonight, but how can I sleep with these horrible aches in my back?

But without sleep—his thoughts continued—how can I put forty more rose bushes in the ground tomorrow? Then at the prospect of tomorrow his mind rebelled. No, he simply could not go on as he'd done today. No matter what the consequences, that was his decision.

He was still lying there about eight when Stella returned. "Mrs. Kopping is very pleased with the work you did today," she said.

"I'm glad," he said, "because it's the last work I'll do for her."

Stella came to the bed and glared down at him. She was getting fat, he noticed suddenly, but without great interest. Her face, always round and plain, was even rounder than it used to be. Life in the Kopping house somehow agreed with her.

"You're talking nonsense," she said. "If Mrs. Kopping wants roses, you'll plant roses."

"I am not taking orders from Mrs. Kopping any more."

Stella hesitated for just a moment, perhaps shocked. But she rallied quickly. "What do you mean by that?"

"I am quitting this job. I am leaving this place."

"Oh no. . ."

"Oh yes, Stella. Don't argue. I've already decided. If I cannot get another job somewhere . . . an easier job . , . then that will have to be. If you are afraid what will become of us, you can stay here."

She answered him with an obivious lack of wifely affection. "I wouldn't mind that a bit, staying here and sending you off. But she wouldn't let me do it. She wants a couple to run the place, and if you'd

leave she'd find another couple, and I'd be out in the cold. So it's either both of us or none of us, my lad, and we'll have to stick together."

"All I know is," Anton said with great fatigue, "I am leaving. It's been a soft life for you here, Stella. In the house all day, with all the new machines to help you. You've gotten fat with it. But I've worked hard . . . too hard. And today was the last."

That was when her quick temper broke loose. First she hurled imprecations at him, all the unpleasant names she could put her tongue to. Then she hurled her person, fists flailing, nails clawing. And when he had managed to fling her off, she used the last weapon in her arsenal—the threat.

"I'll have the police after you. It's against the law in this country for a man to leave his wife and not support her . . ."

He was no expert on what the law did or didn't say. But he caught the menace in Stella's tone, and it made him pause. This sign of weakness only encouraged her.

"And if you think you can run away and hide somewhere, Anton, you're mistaken. You've talked of leaving before, and once I told Mrs. Kopping about it. And do you know what she said? She said a man's a dog who'd run away and leave his wife. And she'd spend her own money to hire detectives to go out and look for you. And when they found you, you'd be clapped in jail where you belong . . ."

Anton Vandrak was by nature a mild-mannered man, a man of the soil, patient, plodding, humble, not given to rebellion or violence. But Stella's revelation goaded him to a sudden, white-hot fury.

That his wife should have discussed him with another woman . . . that they had understood his anguish and his desires . . . but should have plotted together to thwart him . . . to keep him in slavery here . . .

Such was the blinding power of his anger that he forgot his weariness and the pains in his back. But even in his righteous wrath, he at first intended only escape. He lurched to his feet and made for the door. "I am going now," he said.

But Stella was fully as angry and desperate as he. She interrupted him, grabbing at his clothes, screaming repetitions of her threat into his ear.

Stung, hounded, beseiged, Anton Vandrak reacted with primitive passion. This time he did not merely try to fling her off. Rather, he counter-attacked. His muscular arms, the arms of a man who had labored physically all his life, turned aside her blows. His powerful hands, unwashed and ingrained with the dirt of decades, went by instinct to the most fatal area, Stella's throat.

Possibly she managed one shriek of terror, but if so, it was lost amid the other sounds she was already

making. And Anton's great hands immediately choked off her breath. Now that he had her in this deadly grip, now that he held this ultimate power over her, all his hatred burst, as it were, from its containment deep in his heart and coursed through all his veins, screaming for vengeance down to the tips of his fingers.

He knew what he was doing. He knew the facts of life and death well enough to realize what was meant when her face grew red, then purple, when her eyes bulged out of her fat face, when her speechless tongue groped out to lap up air that couldn't be swallowed. He knew that he was killing her, and he wanted to do it.

Then, when it was over and he let her body fall out of his grip, he knew that she was dead, without having to feel for a pulse or listen for a heart beat. He simply stepped over the corpse, went back to his bed, and lay down for a few moments. For a man already tired from a hard day's work, it had been a strength-sapping task, choking Stella. For her neck had been fat and her ample lungs had contained a large supply of reserve air. So the strangling had taken some time.

But as he lay there, his mind was active. More active than it had been for years. Not since he'd had the farm, with all its responsibility of figuring how to battle enemies like weather, insects, crop diseases—had his mind been prodded to such activity as this.

He had a new enemy now, and he was aware of it. Stella had said there were laws against a man's leaving his wife. He knew that there were also laws, sterner laws, against a man's killing his wife. And he knew that the law does not forgive or forget.

He did not want to go to prison or to give his own life for killing Stella. What would he have accomplished, only to have exchanged this prison for another? No, he wanted to gain something, to be ahead in the long run.

Go back to the farm maybe. He was a practical man. It had always made more sense to him to grow wheat rather than roses. And with the machinery one can use on a farm, perhaps he could work without straining his back. Yes, to be a farmer, not a gardener, that would be progress, a step ahead. And this time without having to provide for Stella.

Only he was not yet free of the burden. Stella's presence, her voice, her appetite, her nasty humor—they were gone, to be sure. But her body remained, still a burden to him. He wouldn't be free till he'd rid himself of that last part of Stella.

He thought, and the solution came quickly and easily. If there was no body, there was no murder.

He raised himself from the bed, his weariness suddenly gone. It

wasn't yet nine, and he couldn't be sure that Mrs. Kopping would be in bed till ten at least. But there was other work to be done in the meantime.

He spent the next two hours packing the pair of suitcases and the trunk that he and Stella had come to this place with. The trunk could be sent for later. He filled it, locked it, and left it sitting in a corner. He put into one suitcase things he might need immediately, and into the other, similar things for Stella. He felt he was shrewd in this . . . just in case someone might search those suitcases.

By ten-thirty he had erased from the two little rooms all evidence of his and Stella's occupancy. Then he turned out the lights, lifted Stella's body to his shoulder. She'd been getting fat, but she'd been a short woman. With his mind ecstatic in his new freedom, his back did not complain of the weight.

He carried her down the drive to the last bush he'd planted that afternoon. He was forty-five years old. Four . . . five. He would bury Stella between the fourth and fifth rose bushes.

He was glad now that the earth was already turned over. And the well-kept soil was soft and grainy, not hard-packed. It was a matter only of minutes to dig the grave. Three feet by three feet. Curled up on her right side, Stella fitted into it neatly.

He did not stop for any formal leave-taking. He covered her up, replaced the tools, and went calmly to bed .

. . . And in the morning he went to see Mrs. Kopping. The old lady would be wanting her breakfast, and it would be just as well to break the bad news to her before she'd worked up too great a state of impatience.

He found her in the dining room, sitting at the bare table, reading the newspaper which this morning she seemed to have fetched for herself. But the fact that Stella had not brought her the paper and the fact that here was no sign of activity from the kitchen had not as yet disturbed her. She received Anton in frosty silence. She was a tall, spare, bony woman, austere, unhandsome. She looked this morning as she had always looked.

"Stella and I are leaving," he announced quickly, a little nervously. "In fact, Stella has already left."

Harriet Kopping did not interrupt him.

"We had a long talk last night and decided the work was too much for me here. I am sorry we cannot give notice. I am sorry I cannot plant any more rose bushes. Stella has already left on the early morning bus to the city. I am going to see to the trunk, and then I will catch another bus as soon as I can, and will meet Stella. She forgot her suitcase, and I will have to take both suitcases with me . . ."

He stopped. He had expected her to give some evidence of anger, or at least of surprise. But she sat there silently, hearing him out, almost smiling. Yes, she was smiling!

So he stood there for a moment, silent himself, puzzled over her reaction, uneasy, suspicious. It was not like Mrs. Kopping to smile at any time, much less at a time when there was reason for her to be angry.

"Are you quite finished with your story, Anton?" she asked finally. She sat like a queen in judgment, her silvery hair like a crown.

"Yes, I am finished," he stammered.

"Then I shall tell you what really happened," she said. "You seem to have forgotten that, although I am an old woman, I have sharp eyes and ears. You quarreled with your wife last night, and you killed her."

Instantly he was keyed to this new and unexpected threat. And he was calm at first. "Yes, we quarreled," he admitted. "Stella did not want to leave here, but I convinced her. She is a good wife really. She decided to do the best thing for her husband's health. She took the early morning bus to the city . . ."

"You buried your wife between the fourth and fifth rose bushes."

For a moment his brain would not accept what his ears had heard. This could not be. He knew it could not be. He had buried Stella in the dark, and there had been no one there to see him. Yet . . .

"She has taken the early bus . . ."

"She is dead."

"No . . ."

"Come now, Anton, there is no use in lying."

He said nothing for a long moment. His mind accepted and rejected a dozen different replies and defenses. He was still reasonably calm. The best course, he decided, was to try to find out what this old woman intended to do about her information.

"Well now, we understand each other," she said, guessing at his decision. "I am simply not as stupid as you must have thought me. I heard your quarrel. I heard the loud voices. And then I heard the voices suddenly stop. This is not natural. I waited patiently, because I was very curious. I could not sleep. I saw you bury Stella. Of course my eyesight is not so good that I could see from my window that you buried her between the fourth and fifth bushes. I discovered the exact spot by investigating after you had gone back to bed."

He saw now how stupid he had been, how stupid he had thought this old lady to be. No, she was not stupid—but he was.

"You may be wondering now, Anton, what I intend to do. I wondered myself at first, but I've had all night to think about it. I don't believe I shall call the police, Anton. That would stir up quite a hubbub, and I should lose my very

good gardener. Fortunately I'm not plagued with too tender a conscience. So I shall not mind having a gardener who has murdered his wife."

Instinctively he fought against the net which he could see was closing around him. "But I do not want to stay here . . ."

"You shall stay here and be my gardener, Anton. That is the price of my silence."

He no longer felt calm. His mind groped out desperately for a weapon to counter hers. A thought struck him, and he blurted it out. "I'll move the body . . . I'll dispose of the body . . . I'll take it with me in the trunk . . . then you can't prove. . ."

Her smile grew wider, more tolerant, more superior, and again it was her smile that halted his flow of words. "Yes, Anton, you reason correctly. I would have no hold on you if I could not prove that you had murdered your wife. And to prove a murder, one must have a body. Again must I ask you, do you imagine I am stupid? I have already thought of this. And I have foreseen the possibility you just mentioned. You could dispose of the body some time. I would have no proof of murder, and I would have no hold on you. I have taken care of that problem, Anton."

He stared unbelievingly. He was a helpless listener now.

"Stella's body is no longer between the fourth and fifth bushes. I have moved it."

"Where?"

"That I will not tell you."

But his mind would not accept this last revelation. "You took her out of the ground? You picked her up and moved her? She wasn't a small woman."

For the first time in his life he looked hard and searchingly at Harriet Kopping's physical features. She was not a small woman either. Could she really have uncovered Stella's body, lifted it out of the grave, carried it somewhere?

"I will go and see," he said.

Not waiting for her usual permission to leave, he hurried from the dining room, went outside, got his spade from the tool shed. He was no longer calm. He was both angry and frightened. Before he started to dig, he had to count over and over again to make sure he had the right spot. Between the fourth and fifth bushes.

Then he shoveled fast, with greater speed than he had shoveled last night with his hands fresh from Stella's throat. The already several times loosened dirt yielded easily. And he did not have to go down very far before the bitter truth became all too apparant. The body was not there.

Yet for a few minutes longer his numbed brain would not accept the plain fact. His spade dug deeper, striking the hard-packed, underlying subsoil, then finally an impregnable layer of rock. He stopped

then, sweating, panting, staring incredulously at the empty hole and the mound of earth beside it that was big as the mound a regular grave digger produces when he digs an ordinary grave. But Stella's grave had been a shallow one! He had gone down to rock, but Stella was not there.

He stood there for a long time, leaning on his spade. His weariness of last night did not match the utter exhaustion he felt now. He wanted to lie down in that empty hole, to ask that the dirt be laid over him.

Slowly, only ever so slowly, the ebb of life, the stubborn, senseless desire of every man to go on living, flowed back into him. His simple brain began once again to grasp toward survival. He threw down the spade and marched back toward the house, emotion helping to numb his fatigue.

He found Harriet Kopping still in the dining room, awaiting him. Her smile was ugly, confident, superior. "Did you find Stella?" she asked him.

"No . . ."

"It was a waste of good digging, wasn't it?"

"But I will find her . . . because I will make you tell me where she is."

Mrs. Kopping's still-black brows raised half an inch, making her narrow face look longer. "Do you dare to threaten me, Anton?"

"You may have been strong enough to move Stella, but I am stronger than you."

"Of course you are."

"Then I will make you tell me?"

"Before you touch me, Anton, let me assure you of one fact. You can kill me before I would tell you where Stella's body is. And do you think you can kill me with the same freedom as you killed Stella? Do you think that Harriet Kopping's death could pass unnoticed? Do you imagine that a person of my prominence and importance would not be instantly missed in this town? Yes, you could kill me, Anton, and then run away. A rich old woman dead and her gardener disappeared. How long do you think it would take the police to catch up with you?"

She spoke calmly and incisively, and he realized that what she said was true. He could not kill her as simply as he had killed Stella. He could not even hurt her or threaten to hurt her.

I will search for Stella everywhere. You must have buried her somewhere else. I will dig . . ."

"One moment, Anton. I realize that since possession of Stella's body means everything in our little game, you would naturally search for it. And to a certain extent I cannot prevent you from doing that. But I will allow you to search . . . to dig in my lawn . . . only under two conditions. First of all, you must do it on your own time. Six days a week, eight hours a day, you must continue to work for me,

following my instructions. Secondly, when in your free time you do search, you must not damage or deface my property. I intend to preserve the beautiful lawn I have now, the beautiful lawn which is so important to me that I will tolerate the presence of a murderer here simply because he is an excellent gardener. Do you understand, Anton?"

He nodded dumbly.

"If you loaf on the job I hire you to do, if you mar the looks of my lovely lawn, trying to find Stella, then I shall call the police and tell them exactly where she is."

The bitter pill of defeat was in his mouth now, its size choking him, its taste galling him. Yet he had to swallow it.

His surrender must have been visible on his face, because Harriet Kopping said: "Our second load of rose bushes must have arrived by now. You had better get to work, Anton, if you expect to finish by dark."

He shuffled blindly, obediently, toward the exit. But she stopped him with her last admonition. "And don't forget, Anton, to fill up that hole you just dug between the fourth and fifth bushes. I want my lawn to look like a lawn, not like a cemetery . . ."

. . . If his life before Stella's death had been filled with back-breaking labor, now it was overflowing. Mrs. Kopping hired another housekeeper, whom she allowed to occupy a bedroom up on the second floor, while Anton kept his old quarters. And the new housekeeper was more efficient than Stella had been—which fact seemed to allow Mrs. Kopping to have more time than ever to plan projects for her nine acres of lawn.

The one hundred and sixty rose bushes got planted on schedule, of course, without time-out for corpse-hunting. And they were followed in unending succession by beds and banks and borders of rhododendrons, azaleas, lilies, bluebells, buttercups, ivies, geraniums, periwinkle, wisteria, nasturtiums, chrysanthemums, zinnias, marigold, delphiniums, asters, snapdragons, heliotropes, larkspur, nignonette, poppies, pansies, peonies, sweet william, foxgloves, forget-me-nots. Slowly but surely, with each inch paid for by Anton Vandrak's sweat and Anton Vandrak's agony, the immense green carpet of lawn was rolled back, engulfed, overwhelmed, by the oncoming, ceaseless tide of flowers. Rose Hill was being gradually transformed into a vast garden of stems and leaves and petals, an enormous sea of colors and fragrances.

For a while Anton labored with a grim determination and a goal of his own. If eventually he were to dig up every grain of soil on the premises, he would inevitably discover Stella's second grave. So he

worked overtime on the projects Mrs. Kopping assigned to him—not six days a week, but seven—not eight hours a day, but twelve. The fiery pain in his back grew hotter every day, but the more he suffered, it seemed, the stronger his determination became.

Gradually, however, certain doubts began to assail him. Mrs. Kopping had kept him busy every daylight moment on *new* projects, on turning over turf in *new* areas. But Stella couldn't have been buried under virgin grass without the grass having been disturbed in some way. She was somewhere then where the earth had already been cultivated at the time of her death. So he tried to remember what places those were, such as the rose border along the drive. And he tried to find a few spare minutes every day to search those old areas. Mrs. Kopping, however, was a difficult task-mistress. His spare time was almost non-existent.

Then there came other doubts. If Mrs. Kopping had been physically capable of moving Stella's corpse once, she could have done it twice. He could therefore have searched a certain area, only to have Mrs. Kopping move the corpse to that area the very night following the day he had searched it.

The next doubt which occurred to him was still worse. He had long cherished the certainty that Stella had been *buried* a second time, that Mrs. Kopping had dug another hole in the ground. Then quite suddenly one day he realized that the corpse might be hidden somewhere in the house. He sensed the relative impossibility of this, of course, because he knew that dead bodies rotted and smelled, and that a dead body couldn't be kept in the house very long. But the notion nagged him anyway, so that he tried whenever he could—and never very successfully—to elude Mrs. Kopping and the housekeeper, and roam through some of the rooms. Sniff as he might though, and imagine as he might, no telltale odor ever reached his nostrils.

The final doubt was the worst of all. It came to him one night in his bed, when he was so weary and pain-racked that the slightest movement shot bolts of agony through his torso. Yet when this doubt came to him, he sat suddenly upright in the bed, a scream involuntarily escaping his lips, a scream both of physical pain and of mental shock.

Suppose that somehow Mrs. Kopping had *destroyed* Stella's corpse. Suppose it no longer existed anywhere!

If that were true, she'd been bluffing all this time. She had no evidence against him, no bonds to harness him like a dumb beast to these nine acres of hell. To have suffered all this for nothing!

Could she have destroyed or disposed of the body? His tortured

mind raced through a hundred fantastic schemes for doing away with a human corpse, but without any of them seeming logically possible. Yet he could not banish this doubt any more than the others. It remained with him, like a plague of fire-ants, nibbling at his quivering flesh, eating him alive.

He did not know how much time passed. He measured days from dawn to dusk, from the morning when he dragged his unwilling body to the yoke of the shovel and the spade, to the evening when he crawled back to his bed, seeking oblivion in a sound sleep which he could never attain. He had no measurements for weeks or months. The years, of course, ticked off on nature's clock of awakening plants, of green things growing, budding, flowering, then finally withering, dying, carcasses returning to the soil.

And the years notched themselves too on his own carcass, once upright and sturdy, but now bending ever lower and lower, it too succumbing to the magnetic attraction of the earth for the dust it has lent to life. The pain in his back was now a permanent fact of his existence, like eating or breathing. It was still pain, yet he could not have done without it, for it was his only companion, another self, so overwhelmingly ever-present that it could make him forget his own self—the Anton Vandrak who had committed murder.

So his pain had a merciful aspect too, blotting out his conscience as it did. Does a wrong-doer need to know that what he is suffering is punishment for the thing to be punishment? Not so Anton Vandrak at least. His feeling could scarcely be termed remorse. He wanted Stella back, yes—but not the live Stella. He was a man with a great yearning for a corpse.

But although Anton aged, it did not seem that Harriet Kopping did. She went on watching him from her upper windows, a slave-driver with an invisible whip in her hand. She remained erect, her eyes bright and sharp-seeing, her attitude as basically inscrutable as ever.

And as the years marched on, she watched the accompanying march of the flowers, conquering the greensward, pushing the grass toward final extinction. She did not relent for one day, one hour. Always she had plans for new flowers. She must have realized, of course, that each new bed, border, and bank multiplied her gardener's work, for each new plant had to be carefully tended, trimmed, watered, weeded. Nine acres of flowers need infinitely more care than nine acres of grass.

Nine acres of flowers! Yes, one day it happened. And it was an early summer day, with all the flowers in riotous bloom. A rainbow, a jungle of colors, the breeze audible with the movements of thousands of fragile petals, the air

steamy with their multitude of fragrances. All except for one tiny space. The last little patch of level green, right beneath Harriet Kopping's bedroom window.

"I want another red rose bush right there," she instructed Anton.

He had long ago ceased to argue against her commands. In fact, he was only dimly aware that this was the last of the grass, or that when he folded this final bush into the earth that except for the space which the house and the driveway occupied, he had turned over every last square inch of Harriet Kopping's nine acres.

But the lady herself was exquisitely aware of the occasion. She celebrated it by having a heart attack.

The housekeeper phoned for the doctor, and the doctor came. Shortly afterward a nurse followed, and several deliveries from the pharmacy. But in the midst of all the hubbub, the mistress of the house asked to see Anton Vandrak.

He was admitted to her bedroom —for the first time in his life. And according to her insistent instructions, he was alone with her. He found her very quiet, very pale, almost completely recumbent, her head raised by only one pillow. Yet he was so accustomed to her mastery over him that she was to him just as awesome as ever.

"Anton," she began, "we have some unfinished business, you and I."

"I have planted the rose bush," he said, not understanding.

"But have you found Stella?"

Stella? Of late he had thought of Stella very seldom. But now he remembered her. His wife, whom he had hated and had murdered.

"No," he said, "I haven't found her."

"Do you still want to know where she is?"

He hesitated. He wasn't sure. For a time it had seemed that his whole life had been devoted to finding Stella. Now he was no longer sure. What did it matter now?

"I want to tell you," Mrs. Kopping said. "I want to reward you for your years of faithful service."

He listened passively, unaware of any emotion, pleasant or unpleasant.

"You should be proud, Anton. I think you have made it up to her. Never has any man so cared for, so beautified, his dear wife's final resting place. There is no cemetery in the world, Anton, as lovely as the one which Stella has all to herself. She lies under a living monument of flowers."

"She is buried in the yard then?" He asked it calmly.

"She has always been buried in the yard, Anton. You put her there with your own loving hands."

He did not understand. But for the first time he felt a quickening of the old interest, a resurgence—perhaps only a memory—of his former desperation.

"But you moved her," he argued.

"No, Anton. How could I move an object as heavy as Stella? I'm a frail old woman. I was a frail old woman then."

He blinked his tired eyes, concentrating on the problem. "I opened the grave I had dug . . . between the fourth and fifth bushes. And she wasn't there."

"You dug in the wrong place, Anton. You dug between what were really originally the fifth and sixth bushes. You see, all I dug up and removed was one rose bush, the first in the line. I brought it into the house here and burned it in the fireplace."

He nodded, comprehending only vaguely. He was a stupid old man, he realized. He had always been stupid.

He waited now for Mrs. Kopping to give him further instructions. Now that there was no more space to plant new flowers, should he just go on tending the old ones? But Mrs. Kopping didn't tell him. In fact, she didn't say anything more. Her eyes were closed. Perhaps, he thought, she'd fallen asleep.

So he left the room quietly, went back downstairs, and outside again. The pain in his back was severe today. But that mustn't stop him from working. He had his job to do. He sank to his knees wincing at the stabs of fresh pain, and grasped his trowel. The roses needed tending. He'd been neglecting these old plants by the driveway.

As he worked with the trowel, his mind somehow refused to forget Stella. She seemed very close to him.

HOW MUCH TO KILL?

"Money talks," said Cummins. "A man will do anything if the price is right . . . even kill."

BY MICHAEL ZUROY

So THIS is it," said Sam Tuttle, the public-relations man, casting diagnostic eyes over the development. From the road off which Cummins' car was parked they had walked about a half-mile into the property. "This is the dream stuff you want me to tout. A piece of Florida at a low, low price. Anybody can afford to be a landowner now. Take that first step towards independence and retirement. What's wrong with the deal, Sheldon? What's your gimmick?"

The unassailable dignity of Sheldon Cummins' square cut face did not change, but he attempted no pretense with Tuttle; Tuttle had worked for him before. He merely replied, "That concern you, Sam?"

"It does. I'd like to know what

kind of trouble I might get into."

"It's not too bad. Not bad at all. Nice-looking property, wouldn't you say? I've got roughly two thousand acres in here, mostly level, crossed by babbling brooks, dotted with charming little ponds, off a good U.S. highway, a short ride to beaches, resort areas, shopping towns and industry. Ideal location and a clear title; every buyer gets an ironclad deed. Minimum plot is one-eighth acre. Streets, as you see, are marked out."

Tuttle bent his head to let some of the rain water spill from his hat brim. For several days the weather had been unsettled, vacillating between fine drizzles and heavy downpours. The rain was falling harder now. Still fairly dry in their raincoats, the two men stepped beneath the shelter of a tree. Tuttle glanced at the occasional rough signs projecting from the brush and tall grass. The closest sign read, "Beachcomber Drive."

"Picturesque," observed Tuttle. "Who wouldn't want to live on that street. You going to actually build the streets, Sheldon?"

"Hell, no. I've had them surveyed and marked. That's it."

"Maybe someday the town that collects the taxes will build them, eh? Maybe someday next century, after a fat assessment. But meanwhile the streets are neatly drawn on your plot maps. Let the buyer beware. Well, that doesn't throw me, Sheldon, but I think there's more to your gimmick than that."

"Why so?"

"I look at it like this," said Tuttle. "Here's two thousand acres of good-looking land in one of Florida's more desirable locations. Empty. No buildings, no improvements on it. There are a lot of legitimate real estate developers in Florida—if you'll pardon the distinction. Some of them sell mail-order. But none of them have touched this parcel, and they haven't just overlooked it. You picked it up for next to nothing, if I guess right. Something's extra special wrong about this land. What is it?"

Cummins looked at Tuttle, his thick eyebrows crawling a little closer to each other, like caterpillars. It wasn't Tuttle's curiosity he disliked as much as his attitude. He never had liked Tuttle, he remembered. For an instant he toyed with the idea of booting Tuttle off his property, but his keenly developed acumen as to his own self-interests stopped him. He needed the younger man right now. He needed favorable publicity. He didn't know another public-relations man as competent and as unscrupulous as Tuttle, and anyone who would take on this job would have to be unscrupulous.

There was a lot of money involved here. This was the biggest operation he had ever promoted—by far. It was so big that it frightened him. No one would guess that under his distinguished front

beat a frightened heart, but it was true. He was far out of his league—and alone. He didn't think there was anything as lonely as manipulating a million dollar operation by yourself. Or as worrying.

How he worried! He'd worried every step of the way, over even the smallest decision, over every cent he'd put out. It would be a miracle if he came out of this without an ulcer.

But if things worked out he'd be a millionaire, actually a millionaire. The stake was worth the grief. If things went wrong, he was through. Everything he had and could raise was in this venture.

He said, "Sam, it's been raining a while now. Look there, at that wash coming along that little gully. Look beyond it, there's another one, and another one. Look there, at that brook. Notice how wide and rapid it's become? This is a flood basin, Sam."

Tuttle nodded comprehendingly. "Thought it was something like that."

"Ninety-five percent of the year this area's all right. The rest of the time it's flooded. You can't put a house on this property. The rains hit the hills, miles of them, and they all drain into this basin. Looks like Niagara Falls when the run-off is heavy. Flash floods hit every now and then."

Tuttle swivelled to face Cummins. "Hadn't we better get out of here then? I've read about these flash floods. Read where only a little while back a fellow in a car was swept off a road and drowned."

"Relax," said Cummins. "I know this property. There's a little ridge crossing it from the road, no more than fifty feet wide at best. It's the only ground that never gets flooded. You could hardly tell, but we're standing on it now. We're safe enough. There's even an old shack the surveyors have been using not far along the ridge."

"All right." Tuttle's sharp face went thoughtful. "So what are you asking for one of your damp-dry eighth-acre plots?

"One hundred dollars."

Tuttle nodded. "Doesn't sound like much. Let's see, two-thousand acres at eight-hundred an acre . . ." He whistled softly. "Better than a million and a half dollars!"

"Don't forget the streets, Sam."

"O.K. Subtract the streets. Subtract your land investment and all your expenses. Subtract say two-hundred thousand give or take fifty all told. You're still way over a million."

Cummins said, "And capital gains taxes?"

"You ought to still clear over a million."

Cummins again repressed his irritation with Tuttle. He lit a cigar. "You through figuring my deal, Sam?"

"Yes, I'm through. And in answer to your implied question, yes

I'm interested. I don't foresee trouble. It's not too much of a swindle."

"No swindle, Sam," said Cummins slowly. "The customer gets the land. Maybe it's a little shock when he finds out he can't build on it, but he still owns the land. He's only put a hundred dollars in it. He can pitch a tent in nice weather and go hunting or fishing. He can talk about his Florida property. Maybe some day a flood-control job will happen around here, and then the property will really be valuable."

Tuttle snorted. "Flood control! I wouldn't want to hold my breath until. But it's not too bad a swindle, Sheldon. What do you want me to do?"

The rain turned abruptly into a heavy cascade that gushed through the foliage that had been sheltering them. "We'll be drenched!" yelled Tuttle. "Let's get back to the car."

"Too far in this rain. The shack's a lot closer. Come on."

The two men pounded along the ridge, the hissing torrent driving through their rain-coats in seconds. The shack showed up, and Cummins fiddled with the lock and they burst in.

The shack had once been used as a dwelling and contained several rooms in one of which the surveyors had stored some equipment. The floors sagged and were covered with dust, dried mud and woods debris, and the walls leaned, but the roof still managed to shed water, and the men took off their wet coats and hung them on a couple of the nails that bristled from the walls. They were silent a while, listening to the fury of the downpour, strumming on the roof shingles as it swept across, slapping at the crusted window panes and leaving flowing streams of water that obscured the outside.

"We're liable to see some flooding before this is over," said Cummins. "But, to go on with our business, all I want from you, Sam, is a good press, and I mean nationwide. Most of this land is going to be sold mail-order. Sure, some buyers will come in person, but the odds are they'll see the property at its best, and for a hundred dollar investment they won't be doing much investigating. Mainly, it's the advertising campaign that'll be doing the selling, so it's got to be top-flight, and believe me, it is. It's wrapped up now, all set to go, waiting for the word from me. We ran a couple of test ads, and the percentage was pretty.

"But advertising needs support to gain public confidence. You know how it is, Mr. Doakes reads our ad and sits there dreaming how phenomenal the offer is, if he could believe it. Then he starts forgetting it, and turns some pages, and surprise, right before his eyes is a dignified little news article on our beautiful development. That does it. Doakes has learned to trust us. He digs for his money. That's

where you come in, Sam. I want those dignified little articles."

"Can do," said Tuttle. "How much?"

"Five thousand now, two payments of ten thousand each as the work progresses."

"Not enough." Tuttle's reaction was automatic. "That's only twenty-five thousand. I'll take fifty."

Cummins glared. "Don't try to hold me up, Tuttle. The job's not worth that much. It's no sweat for you and I know it. I'm offering you more than enough."

"A job with a smell costs more. Let's hear another offer."

Cummins resentment began to boil. Tuttle was a nasty little profiteer and a wise-guy to boot. If there were any handy alternative he'd tell him off. He needed Tuttle all right, but he didn't appreciate being black-jacked, and maybe someday he could return the favor. Meanwhile, he forced himself to dissemble.

The bickering went on, seeming as endless almost as the hard driving rain, but at last they agreed on a figure of thirty-seven thousand. When it was settled, they grew impatient to get back to Cummins' car, but the rain refused to let up, so they waited, until finally there came an abrupt cessation of its violence. Through the windows they saw the sky lighten a very little, and the sound outside changed to a delicate unsteady patter. They were donning their raincoats when the new sound began.

"My God!" said Tuttle. "What's that?"

It was a far-off roar that rushed rapidly and irresistibly, swelling as it came until it had grown to a frightening thunder that seemed to submerge and surround them, holding interminably, finally to lessen to a huge rustling.

Cummins watched Tuttle's paling face maliciously. He didn't feel too comfortable himself, but it was good to watch the man fighting against panic. "Flash flood," he explained at last.

"Well then, let's get the hell out of here! What are we waiting for?"

"According to my information this ridge has never been under water. This shack's been standing here a good fifty years, so we should be all right. Let's take a look."

The men went out, took a few steps and halted. The narrow strip of dry land which was the ridge still meandered before them, but everything else on either side was under water. It was as though they were standing within a restless lake across the surface of which white, foaming streams still rushed down from the heights.

"My God," repeated Tuttle. "And this is what you're selling! What makes it come so fast?"

"Same principle as a rolling snowball. Water flows together as it descends from a thousand different sources." Cummins headed

back along the ridge, but unhurriedly, aware that Tuttle was still afraid, savoring and prolonging Tuttle's fear. Tuttle could not give up his dignity and run; he had to stick with this pace.

Therefore it was quite some time before the two men reached a view of what had happened out on the water.

Cummins saw it first, his suddenly rigid back bringing Tuttle to his side. Cummins' immediate reaction was that of a surprised bystander, but then the implications grew clear and a sick feeling pushed into his middle. Why? he thought. Why right now?

"Looks like kids!" Tuttle was shouting in his ear. "Two boys."

The figures stood a couple of hundred feet across the turbulent water on what had been a knoll, except that it was now about a foot under. The water raced and splashed over the boys' knees as they hung on to some brush. They began waving and calling frantically at sight of the men.

"How soon'll the water go down?" yelled Tuttle.

Cummins looked at him grimly, and pointed at the white streams still roaming over the lake, breaking into spray where they divided around the trees that rose from the flood. "Still going up."

"The kids will drown. We've got to get help."

Cummins grabbed Tuttle's arm. The blind fool, he thought. Doesn't he understand? "No time. It's up to us. The surveyors keep some line in the shack. Let's get it." He turned and ran heavily, aware that after a pause Tuttle followed.

When the line was secured and fastened to a tree at a point opposite the marooned boys, Cummins rapidly stripped. Tuttle eyed him with a peculiar expression. "You really going in, Sheldon?"

"What the hell does it look like?"

"I take my hat off to you. I didn't think you had it in you. I wouldn't step into that torrent for anything."

Cummins looped the line around his waist and ungracefully splashed into the flood. He gasped at the cold shock and struck into the turbulence. His muscles felt the strain at once and water surged into his nostrils. He was only a fair swimmer and he was too heavy but he forced his arms alternately ahead with savage persistence until it seemed that he had been swimming a very long time. Then he looked up and was stunned to discover that he had lost ground. The travelling water had moved him below the boys, although he was some distance from the ridge.

Cursing his stupidity in not allowing for the flow, he turned back, gained the ridge and flopped upon the ground, gasping, waiting until his breathing had slowed, paying no attention to Tuttle's talk.

When he was ready he plunged in again a good distance above his

first position. He noted that the boys were now submerged almost to their waists. He had to get them out on this try.

He swam powerfully, but tried to avoid haste, to conserve his strength. Soon his eyes lost all sight but that of the plunging water which struck at his face. There was no sound in his ears but the rushing and roaring of water.

While his body fought for its life, steadily losing power against the tireless water, his mind grew curiously calm and detached, as though this diminished world in which he struggled could make no demands upon it. Was he being a fool, he wondered? His mind deliberately weighed this, while he admired the clarity of his thinking. He had come to the fork in the road, his mind told him. He had rejected the easy path that led to—nothing. It was now all out, and nothing suffered to block him, even the risk of his own life. He was not being a fool.

Now it seemed impossible that he could lift each arm one more time. He was out past the edge of endurance, almost past the edge of consciousness, but the thought held fast: those kids must not drown.

He made it, of course, that single-minded purpose driving him to his object. After he dropped his feet onto the knoll, he fastened the line to the sturdiest and highest limbs he could find among the brush, praying that it would hold. He sized up the kids quickly and sent the larger and huskier of the two back along the line by himself.

He waited until he was sure the kid was making it, then started the other one off, staying right with him. Twice the force of the water began to tear the boy off the rope, but Cummins grabbed him and held him, bulling him along until he regained his grip.

"Why, you're a hero, a blasted hero," Tuttle told him when the boys were safe on the ridge, sitting huddled together, resting. "That was a fine thing to do, Sheldon."

Cummins regarded him contemptuously, and swivelled his head to make sure the boys were out of hearing range. "Save your praise, Sam," he said. "I did it for only one reason—a million dollars."

"Clear that up, will you."

"You slipping, Sam? You can't be that dense. Suppose the two little punks drowned on my property. That's news, isn't it? Headline news a lot of places. The national papers would carry something on it. Florida Flash Flood Drowns Two Youngsters in Real Estate Development. I might as well fold up and steal away after that. Nobody would pay a dime for this property. You don't think I want to spend my declining years selling insurance, do you?"

Tuttle bowed satirically. "Forgive me for misjudging you. Ever the promotor, eh Sheldon? As a public relations man the aspect you

mention should have occurred to me, but I was too concerned about the boys' danger. Foolish of me. I must be, as you say, slipping."

"Now, this way," went on Cummins, "it doesn't matter too much if the boys chatter about what happened. A close shave is hardly news. Oh, it might make a local paper or two, but that's about all. The kids are alive, that's the main thing. Corpses we don't need around here."

"I admire your logic," said Tuttle. He glanced at Cummins meditatively. "You'd do anything for money, wouldn't you, Sheldon?"

"For enough money. Like anybody else. Don't you go superior on me, Sam, we're all the same, all of us humans. The only difference is the price. Everybody has their price, five hundred, five thousand or five million. For me a million does it. I'd do anything for a million. You didn't jump in after those boys because there was only thirty-five thousand in it for you. Not enough."

"Plus the fact that I can't swim."

The rain began to patter down more strongly again, and Cummins looked worriedly over at the boys. Couldn't have them contracting pneumonia either; had to get them under shelter. They'd return to the shack.

When they were all inside the old building, Cummins regarded the youngsters keenly. They seemed to be about fifteen or sixteen years old, neither too well built although one was slightly taller. The taller one had a broad jaw, open blue eyes and freckles. The other was spindly looking with sharp features and a narrow head and a weak button of a chin. His eyes seemed perpetually half-closed and flat.

"We want to thank you again for pulling us out of there, Mister," said the spindly one. He said it reluctantly, as though grudging the necessity.

"That's all right, that's all right," returned Cummins genially. "As long as you kids are safe. Where you from?"

"New York." The boy pulled up a leg of his worn jeans and scratched casually.

"New York. That's a long way off. What are you doing all the way down here?"

"Seeing the country."

"Where are your folks?"

The boy jerked a thumb at his companion. "Joe there, he doesn't have any. Mine are still in New York, I guess."

"You guess? What did you do, run away?"

The boy shrugged. "Nothing to run away from. The old man's a booze hound. My old lady, well let's forget her. They ain't missing me."

"What's your name?"

The boy's grin was almost a snarl. "Elias. Elias Smith. That's Joe Jones over there."

"Oh, come on!"

The boy nodded his head vigorously, grinning. "Sure, that's us. Smith and Jones. Jones and Smith," He laughed.

"Now don't get smart," said Cummins heavily. "What were you doing on this property?"

"Sight-seeing."

"I'm losing my patience," said Cummins.

"Well, for Chris-sake, what do you want, a big fancy story? We turned in off the road to sleep last night, that's all. Say what are you, a cop or somethin', Mister?"

"No, I'm not a cop, I'd just like to know."

"Hey, he's just nosy," said the other boy.

The spindly one cackled. "Sure, nosy. So this is what happened, nosy. We couldn't stay dry account of the rain, so in the morning we walked in a ways looking for a better spot. We found one and settled down and all of a sudden there was this wall of water, looked about ten foot high coming down on us. Joe and me, we got to that little hill. The other guy didn't make it."

The silence stretched while Cummins absorbed the words. "What other guy?" he asked slowly, at last.

"The other guy, the other guy. Herb, the other buddy. The water caught him."

"There were three of you? You're telling me that there were three of you?"

The boy appealed to Tuttle. "Hey, has this lad got all his marbles? Ain't I just finished tellin' him there was another guy?"

Suddenly Cummins struck the boy a back-handed blow across the cheek that sent him sprawling. "Enough of your sass. Talk straight, now. What happened to the third boy?"

The boy who called himself Smith lay on the floor as he had fallen, his eyes growing flatter and more heavy-lidded. He did not appear otherwise angered or surprised at the blow; he appeared used to blows. He said softly, "I guess Herb got drowned. That straight enough for you? Anything else you want to know?"

This was too much, Cummins thought. After all he'd been through, to end up with a drowning on his hands was too much. "Let's take a look around," he said to Tuttle dully. "You boys wait. We'll be back."

The men walked the ridge carefully, not speaking, watching the water and the ragged water line along the ridge. After a while they came upon it, as Cummins had known they would. It was a soaked blob of denims, and when Cummins turned it over with his foot, there was the young drowned face.

"Pity," said Tuttle.

"Yes, a pity," said Cummins bitterly, not meaning it the same way.

After a silence, Tuttle said, "I guess this blows your million all

right."

Cummins was thinking hard. "I don't think I'm through yet, Sam." His mouth worked. "Suppose nobody finds out about this drowning?"

The two men stared at each other, each working out this line of thought in their own way.

"We bury the body in the muck," Cummins went on. "It'll never turn up. The kid was a nobody, like the other two. The chances are there'll never be any inquiry made after the little bum. There isn't anybody gives a damn about kids like these or knows where they are. So another drifter disappears."

"You want me to keep quiet?"

"That's right."

"For a price?"

"That's right. You got a price, Sam."

Tuttle nodded. "Certainly I have. You know me that well, Sheldon. How much?"

"Seventy thousand."

Tuttle whistled. "Just for keeping my mouth shut. Well, well. It's tempting, but risky. What about the other two boys?"

"I admit that's a weak point. I was thinking we could give them some money and a couple of tickets out of the state."

Tuttle shook his head slowly. "Not good. They can talk wherever they are. Sooner or later those boys are going to run foul of the police. How do you know what they'll say then? No, Sheldon, the story's too apt to come out."

Cummins looked at him broodingly.

"Count me out," Tuttle said regretfully. "It's a nice piece of change, but I don't want to be accused of hiding a body. Besides, if the story came out it would really queer your little deal, wouldn't it?"

"I agree with you, Sam," Cummins said in a strained voice. "It won't do. But there's another way to make sure the boys won't talk."

Tuttle grinned. "Oh, sure, we can. . ." But then he saw Cummins' eyes and the grin died.

"Yes," said Cummins, "there's another way."

"Now don't be fantastic, Sheldon."

"Fantastic! I tell you, Sam, this means a million dollars to me. One million dollars! For that price I'll do it."

"Forget it, will you. You don't think for one moment I'd go along?"

"You've got a price for this too, Sam."

"Not for this."

"Less than an hour's work, Sam. Two lousy little bums. They're no use to themselves or anybody else anyway. We'd be doing society a favor. We could plant the three of them so deep in the muck they might as well have vanished into thin air. Nobody's going to bother wondering about them. Hell, they'd be dead right now if I hadn't rescued them. So I made a mistake.

I'll just correct that mistake."

"I wish you'd stop talking this way."

"What's the price, Sam? Two hundred thousand?"

"I admit I've pulled some shady stunts in my time," said Tuttle, "but I stop short at murder, at any price. Now cut it out, Sheldon You're not a murderer and you know it."

"You're absolutely right," replied Cummins. "I have no desire to murder anybody. It makes me sick to think about it. But I'm telling you again, Sam, for this much money I'll kill. How about three hundred thousand?"

"Look, Sheldon, why don't you simmer down? Forget it, and I'll see what I can do about squashing the story."

Cummins shook his head. "There's nothing you can do or you would have mentioned it before. A kid drowned in a flood in a big real estate development? That story won't squash once it gets out. I'm convinced this is the only way. Don't try holding me up, Sam, I'm warning you. I'll go four hundred thousand and that's my limit. Are you going to accept it?"

"No."

"All right, Sam," said Cummins softly. "I gave you your chance." He raised his powerful hands and placed them on Tuttle's throat. Tuttle tried to jerk back, but the hands tightened. "You're crazy, Sheldon," Tuttle yelled and swung his fist against Cummins' head, but the blow seemed to make no impression.

Cummins began to squeeze, ignoring the man's struggles, and slowly Tuttle sank to his knees and his back arched, so that Cummins had to bend over him while he squeezed. Cummins went to his own knees to ease the uncomfortable position. After a while he took his hands away and rose to his feet and Tuttle's body collapsed on the ground.

It was the only solution, Cummins thought. It might be taking a chance, but he had chosen to go all out and he would have to accept the risk. He estimated that the odds were with him. Tuttle was a lone wolf, and since this job was on the shady side it was unlikely that he had discussed it with anyone. He had no car here; he had arrived by plane. It would simply be a case of a man disappearing, a man whose connection with himself would remain private. If ever questioned he would give the proper answers. It would occur to no one to search this property, and in any case, Tuttle's body would never be found.

Next, the boys. Unfortunately, he had no weapon with him, but if necessary he would take care of them with his bare hands also. However, he seemed to remember something about the surveyors' supplies. He knitted his brow, try-

ing to visualize. Yes, he remembered. There was an axe.

He decided on his course of action. When he entered the shack he would walk casually to the storeroom and get the axe. They would be unsuspecting, so that he could kill at least one of them without a struggle. After that, the axe would make short work of the other, even if he tried to fight.

Cummins reached the shack, opened the door and stepped in.

The kids were sitting on the floor, backs against the wall. "Hey!" said the skinny one. "Look who's here." He rose, grinning sarcastically and sidled over to Cummins. "Where's the other fellow?"

"He won't be back," Cummins said shortly. "Had some business."

The last thing Cummins saw was the knife the kid pulled. . .

When the body was still the boy began going through the pockets. "I don't know if you shudda knocked him off," the taller boy said doubtfully.

"Why not? Looks well-heeled, don't he?"

"Yeah, but after all he saved our hides."

"Because he was a dope. If he wasn't a dope he wouldn't have got it now. That's what I keep tellin' you, don't be a dope. He rubbed me the wrong way anyhow." The boy came up with a fat wallet and cackled. He counted the money and looked up, his flat eyes taking on a glitter. "Two hundred and thirty-eight dollars," he said, awe creeping into his voice. "It was worth knocking him off. Jeez, for that much money I'd knock off anybody."

It's the Law

Collected by Floyd Hurl

In Tacoma, Washington

it is mandatory for a motorist with criminal intentions to stop at the city limits and, by telephone, warn the chief of police that he is entering town.

In Lindenhurst, New York

it is a crime for a woman to give a man a permanent wave.

In Moscow, Idaho

there is a statute requiring couples who sit on the grass to maintain an upright position.

In Lehy, Washington

there's a law that says no man shall blow his nose outdoors . . . lest he frighten a horse.

In New York

a court has ruled that a man's desire to be married is not evidence of insanity.

In Muskogee, Oklahoma

it is against the law for a ball team to hit a ball over the fence.

In Kentucky

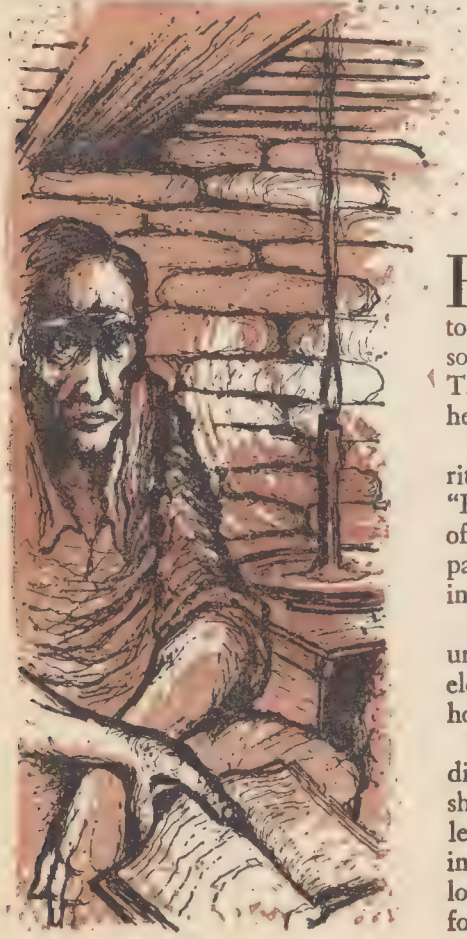
it has been decided perfectly legal for a wife to pour castor oil into her husband's whiskey . . . it being a wife's right to reform her husband.

In Norman, Oklahoma

a young woman will find it illegal to sit on a man's lap without a cushion under her.

THE ALARMIST

"Let them laugh," he thought. "Let them laugh now, but they'll be dead and I'll be alive." He dug furiously and each night his bomb shelter became deeper and more impenetrable.



BY DONALD TOTHE

Ed Manson, the candlelight casting flickering shadows on his tousled, brown hair, listened to the sounds of many excited voices. They were the first voices he'd heard for two days and two nights.

"Ed, listen to me." It was the irritated voice of Neil Nicholson. "Everything is o.k. Now, come out of there." The voice was losing its patience, as it pleaded with the man in the dark, cellarlike room.

"Open the door, Mister Manson," urged the quivering voice of the elderly spinster who lived two houses away.

His eyes formed narrow slits of distrust as he stared at the thin sheet of lead which covered the door leading from the house. There were, in addition to the indestructible-looking hasp and padlock, three formidable bars of steel spanning

the door. This was the only entrance to the underground room.

He knew something like this would happen after an attack. They would all change into animals. They would try to break into his shelter—the only one on the block. Probably the only one within miles.

They would kill him for his uncontaminated food and water. That's why he was ready for them.

"Who's laughing now?" He demanded, semi-hysterically. "Let's hear it! Aren't you folks laughing anymore?"

"No, we're not laughing, Ed." Neil was the closest thing to a friend that he had. Neil was a foreman at the Magnesium Products Chemical factory a mile up the street. Ed dropped him off there every morning and picked him up on the way home. The Nicholsons had been his next-door neighbors for five years now. Being a single man, though, he'd never gotten too thick with them—he wasn't too thick with anyone.

"Ed—you listening? The doctor is here." Neil's voice was different, somehow, as he tried to reason with his friend. "It wasn't a bomb. It was an explosion at the lab. Now, open the door. We're worried about you."

Manson waved the high-powered rifle at the door as if they could see it. "Clear out! You'll get no help from me," he told them, bitterly. "You all had your chance—same as I did."

He thought he could hear the shuffling of feet. Then the house above him was silent.

He stumbled away from the door and slumped on the cot. He tried the radio again—but only for an instant—until he remembered his stupidity.

Even with the sound-deadening bags of sand piled around the room, he felt the jar of a battering ram on the door. The cross-bars jiggled. The lead warped and buckled, ringing a short alarm.

He ran back to the door, cursing under his breath as he knocked over the ten-gallon pail which had taken the place of his toilet.

"Don't do that again!" He shouted at them, desperately. "I've got a gun and I'll start pumping bullets through the door."

Neil laughed—a low, nervous laugh, barely loud enough to carry into the completely enclosed chamber.

"Take it easy, Ed old boy." He talked as if to a child. "We're just doing this for your own good."

Ed could picture Neil shrugging his broad shoulders and turning up his palms as he lifted his arms to his sides. He could almost see the grin on Neil's face—the same grin he had seen eight months ago.

Was it that long ago? It seemed like only last week that they were on their way to work when Ed disclosed his idea.

Neil had laughed, heartily. "A bomb shelter? You mean you're

going to build a shelter just because of that program on television?"

The literature from the local Civil Defense office had arrived two days later. It contained all the necessary instructions and plans.

Right from the time he began hauling in the lumber and bricks they laughed at him. At first, just giggles and amused expressions but later they laughed openly to his face.

There was no cellar or basement and he had decided on an underground shelter connected to the house. He also decided to build it himself.

He'd always been considered somewhat of an eccentric and now they were sure there was something strange about him as he dug in the yard until all hours of the night.

He seemed to work with a dreadful urgency. It took him nearly the whole summer to dig the gaping hole. It was a ten foot square and seven feet deep—as long as he was doing it he decided to make it comfortable.

He went a step farther than the pamphlets advised. After building up the eight-inch-thick concrete walls and ceiling he covered the interior with a thin layer of lead, after reading somewhere that it was an excellent shield against radiation.

Then against all the walls, piled to the ceiling, he placed sand bags. Covering one sand-bag-wall was a stack of shelves loaded with canned goods. Another smaller set of shelves was filled with books—he knew his worst enemy would be boredom.

By the time he completed the entrance from inside the house and attached the lead on the inside of the door the immediate usefulness of the shelter had become a foregone conclusion in the mind of Ed Manson. He read the ominous headlines and the pessimistic accounts of the disarmament talks. He saw right through the smoke-screen the Russians were sending up.

He read all the books on atomic warfare, particularly a prophetic novel about how atomic particles, after a nuclear war, were carried by the winds to every part of the earth. He believed the story. He was convinced of its inevitability!

By the time he had the walls of the room half-covered with sandbags his nightly sleep was already being interrupted by vividly horrible dreams of an atomic war.

By the time he had stocked the underground den of salvation with food enough for many months he found pangs of doomful premonition continually invading his innermost thoughts.

And indeed, by the time everything was in preparedness he found his mind saturated with visions of worldly disaster. Instead of a relaxing effect, the escape chamber had produced an everpresent aura of morbidity—a constant reminder

that the earth was one large ball of atomic explosive with a short, highly inflammable fuse.

It happened on a Saturday night. He was in the living room, his head against the back of his chair, which faced away from the window. His eyes were closed. He was thinking about the bomb and its giant, ascending mushroom.

A loud thud in the distance! Then a rumble. The windows in the house shattered. He was lifted from the chair by a great, invisible hand.

He opened his eyes. The room was filled with brilliance.

Pure reflex action took over. He knew he musn't turn and face the radiation. He ran from the room—through the kitchen to the door leading from the service porch, shielding his eyes as best he could.

He slammed the door behind him. Leaned against the cold metal for only a few seconds, his heart beating, wildly.

There was another explosion—more violent than the first. He felt the ground shake. He clutched at the door. He trembled in the darkness.

He stood, frozen, for what seemed like an hour. But only a minute passed.

His eyes were open but they saw nothing. Groping around in the dark his hands located the large candle. He was half-afraid to strike a match, convinced that the radiation had blinded him. But he felt no different—no burning sensations.

He struck a match and thanked God as the room lit up. He was alone with the slowly quivering flame.

The next explosion nearly toppled the book shelf. A horrible vision of the outside panic raced through his mind.

When everything was still again he went to the door, slid the steel bars over and fastened them in place. He pushed shut the padlock, sealing himself in and everyone else out. It served the stupid fools right—they'd been warned for years.

The portable radio failed to bring in the Konelrad stations—it was dead. He imagined things were pretty bad when there wasn't even an emergency broadcast.

"How in the hell had they surprised us so?" He asked no one in particular.

The rest of the night was punctuated by wailing sirens, clanging bells, and the raucous blasts of frantic horns. At least there were other survivors.

Outwardly calm, he sealed off the major portion of his mind as he drank a cup of black coffee. It helped to loosen the lead-tight muscles of his stomach.

Surprisingly, he slept through the night.

The next morning he ate a hearty breakfast. He hadn't depended on it but there was still gas coming

through the pipes. He was supposed to have turned off the main valve—it was only one of the many things he had not done.

He spent the day reading and listening. It was much quieter than the night before.

The second night he spent in deathly silence, except for the steady ticking of the clock, which became unbearably loud.

He passed most of the next day reading Shakespeare.

If only he knew what was happening outside. He had never gotten around to installing some sort of radiation detector that would tell him when it was safe to leave the shelter. He had depended on the radio for instructions but he had also never gotten around to putting up an antenna.

Gotten around to it, hell! He told himself. He'd never even tried the radio until it was too late. The portable was useless to him.

It was a quarter past one in the afternoon when he heard the first sounds of the day from the "outside world." Someone was walking around in his house.

He heard voices calling his name.

"He must be in the bomb shelter. We've looked everywhere else," said Neil's wife, concernedly.

There was pounding on the door.

He remained silent but alert, his mouth grimly taut but his eyes wide and alive.

"He must be in there. Maybe, he was injured from the explosion and he's in there, unconscious. We'll have to break down the door."

"Stop!" Ed shouted. "Get away from the door and leave me alone." He would kill every one of them before he'd ever open the door.

They were silent for a moment. "What on earth are you doing in there, Ed?"

"I'm trying to survive. That's what I'm doing."

"Survive what? You must have been in there for two days now. Nobody has seen you since the explosions."

Ed's laugh was wild. "Why do you think I built this thing? I was in here twenty seconds after the bomb went off."

"Bomb? What bomb?" Neil's short laugh caused Ed's mind to leap forward to the present.

Neil was repeating, for the fifth time, "Those were explosions down at the lab."

The battering started again.

Ed pulled the trigger of the rifle. He heard a woman scream, then the murmuring of voices.

"You've just killed old Miss Willowby, Ed. I don't know what's gotten into you."

He looked at the gun. Dropped it to the floor. Stared at the hand which had fired the shots.

He shook his head, rubbed his eyes, blinked three times.

What had he done?

It was like awakening from a dream. Numbly, he made his way

to the door, shoved the key into the lock—it snapped open with a loud click. He slid the bars to the side.

He started to pull the door back when it rushed at him. It knocked him backwards. He heard their low, gurgling mumbles as they rushed in.

He was half-way behind the door so they were able to pass him without trampling him to the floor. But he could see the horrible splotches and burns on their faces and arms. He could see the crazed expressions in their eyes—eyes which had seen unbelievable sights during the past two days.

He wondered how they'd been able to fool him so completely.

He wondered how they'd been able, in their condition, to think so clearly.

He wondered how long it would take for them to contaminate everything in the room; the food, the water . . . and him.

More than one million Americans are living proof. Remember . . . your contributions helped save many of these lives. Your continuing contributions are needed to help discover new cures and, ultimately, the prevention of cancer itself • Remember, too, if you delay seeing your physician, you drastically cut your chances of cure. Annual checkups are the best way of detecting cancer in time • Guard your family! Fight cancer with a checkup and a check.

AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY

There were two down and one to go. The third was the big man, the master mind. I had to get to him in a hurry because there was a general alarm out on me . . . for murder.

THE MASTER MIND

I KNEW I was trapped the moment I looked out the window of my room. I recognized Monk's car across the street, backing into a parking space only a few doors up from the hotel. I watched the car slide back to the curb, rock for a moment, then settled down. The front door opened and Monk stepped out. He looked down to the corner, then flashed a look up at my window. I knew he couldn't see me behind the drape but I shrank back anyway. He walked across to the hotel entrance.

There was no use running for it now. If Monk would come in the front way like that it meant somebody else would be out back—waiting to gun me down like a scared rabbit if they could flush me from cover. These boys were top professionals, they played rough football, and they played for keeps. Well, so did we.

I swore to myself as I backed away from the window. This wasn't the way I wanted it but now it couldn't be helped. It had only taken me twenty minutes to tape the miniature microphone and recorder to my thighs and connect the fine wire to the switch to hide in my clothes, but that was twenty minutes too long. I finished dressing quickly—then slumped into the one stuffed chair in the room and leaned back as if I were dozing. The door was locked, but if Monk had a key he wouldn't knock.

As I waited I wondered if it would have been better to duck right in and away—grab the transistor recorder and put it on somewhere else, instead of trying to do

A Novelette

BY WALTER MONAGHAN

it here. Then I realized that it didn't matter. Whoever was watching for me would have turned into a tail and followed me until he could reach Monk or one of the others and tell them where I was. This was quicker, it might even work out better. And I was all set now, or as set as I could be, with the little electronic ear all ready to go right to work. I slid my hand into my jacket pocket and turned the tiny switch on. Outside the door I heard the faint sound of a footstep on the soft carpet. I put my hands on the arms of the chair, in plain sight and palms down.

The doorknob turned silently, then it turned back when he found the door locked. A soft tap sounded.

"Huh? Yeah?" I grunted. "Who is it?"

"Telegram for you, Mr. Young." The voice was much higher than Monk's.

I almost laughed. One wrong move for Monk. He didn't have two cents worth of imagination in his whole body. I was tempted to tell him to slide it under the door, but that would only delay things.

"Okay," I called. "Right away."

I shuffled over to the door noisily and turned the lock and pulled the door opened. I kept one hand high on the door and the other out front rubbing my eye.

"I wasn't expecting a telegram from any . . ." I stopped talking and put the most surprised look on my face I could. "Monk! Am I glad to see you. Come on in."

He was standing a little off to the right, his .38 automatic held up high in his left hand. It was aimed right at my heart. His face was set, his mouth grim, his eyes bird-bright.

"Monk, what is this?" I said. I thought my voice sounded surprised too.

"Shut up and get back in the room," he growled.

I backed up fast, my hands still way out front. Monk followed me in and closed the door. Then he locked it carefully. He leaned against the bureau and motioned me into the chair I had just left.

"Now we can have a nice little talk without being disturbed," he said. "Just sit there nice and quiet and answer my questions. Make one quick move and you're a dead one. In fact, if you make a slow move you're a dead one too. Understand?"

"Sure, Monk, sure," I said. I tried to put a whine in my voice. "What's this all about, anyway? Coming up here putting a gun on me—I thought I was supposed to be working for you."

"Yeah, good buddy. I thought you were working for me too. Now I'm not so sure. Maybe you're working for yourself, or for somebody besides me, or maybe you're working against me, who knows? Now tell me just what happened this afternoon, right from the be-

ginning. And the first time I catch you in a lie it's just like you pull the trigger yourself. You don't know just how much I know about what happened, so let's have it, real straight."

That's where Monk was wrong. I knew more about every single move he'd made all afternoon than he did himself. In fact I think I knew more about Monk Saunders, past, present, and future, than he could ever know himself.

"Okay, okay, Monk," I said. "You don't have to wave that gun under my nose. I didn't know how to get in touch with you or Larry, so I thought the best thing to do was come back here and wait in my room for you. I thought maybe you'd call and give me a meet. I stashed the stuff away so it's safe. I don't want any part of it, I just did what I thought was right, so help me, Monk."

"What happened this afternoon?" Monk repeated. His voice was grim.

"Jeez, Monk, you were there. You know as much about it as I do. After I met you at the bridge we rode down in the subway to Radio City. The guy Pete who was supposed to show me which jeweler to go to sat across from me all the way down, reading a paper. I never even nodded to him. When he got off at 47th Street I followed him, just about ten feet behind, like you said. You saw us, you and Larry in the same car."

"Yeah, I saw you all right in the subway, but what happened on the street?"

"I followed Pete up the subway steps to the street. Just as he got to the top two coppers grabbed him and pushed him into a cigar store. I had that bag full of stuff and it sure felt awfully heavy right then. I was sure they'd grab me too. There was nothing I could do but keep on going as fast as I could. I did. I figured you and Larry would be right behind me but when I looked for you at the next corner I couldn't see either of you. I guess I panicked a little but I knew I had to get out of that neighborhood fast, so I just kept travelling until I came to Grand Central. Then I calmed down a bit and thought the best thing to do was stash that stuff someplace real quick."

"Where is it?" Monk interrupted.

"I put it in a subway locker in Grand Central Station," I told him. "It was the nearest and best and safest place I could think of. After all, I'm not used to carrying a load of hot jewelry around. Anything could happen, then you'd blame me."

"Okay, buddy, let's have the key." Monk held out his free hand.

I swallowed hard. "Look, Monk, let me explain. These coppers scared me the way they grabbed Pete. As soon as I put the stuff in the locker I got a heavy brown envelope in a store there and mailed the key to myself here at the hotel. Nobody saw me, I'm sure of that.

One night last week my parole officer was sitting right here in this room waiting for me to come in, and when I did he tossed me from head to foot. If he was waiting here tonight he'd do the same thing. I just didn't want to take a single chance, that's why I did it. The key will be here in the morning mail, Monk. You can stay right here with me and I'll go down with you to get the stuff. That's the truth, so help me."

"Maybe it is, and maybe it isn't," Monk said. His mouth was still a thin line, his eyes still shiny-bright.

I could read a little relief there, when he heard the stuff was stashed someplace where he might get his hands on it again—the greed showed through.

I knew he'd never kill me until he had his hands on that haul again and right now I was his only chance of doing just that. If that did happen, and I knew it couldn't, I'd never need my Blue Cross again, but might be able to use a clear title to a little plot in some graveyard.

"That's a pretty good story," Monk said slowly. "Trouble is, I don't believe it. This whole deal today smells, and the more I figure it, the more I think it's you that stinks."

"Look, Monk, I did what I thought was right. I did just what you told me to. You got no right saying that to me."

"I got right," Monk said. He raised the .38 a little higher on me. "I got all the right I need. Me and Larry and the Boss talked a lot about you tonight, and none of it was good. We even figure you might be a stoolie."

I half rose out of my chair, my face angry. "I'm no stoolie, Monk. If you didn't have that gun on me I'd wrap your nose around your face for calling me that. If I was crossing you I could have grabbed a train in Grand Central and been on my way to Chicago with the stuff by now. But I come back here to wait for you to give you your lousy diamonds and you peg me as a stoolie. You and your friends are the ones who stink."

"Shut up and sit down," he growled.

I could see I'd scored heavily by the doubt and confusion in his face. Monk was badly rattled by everything that had happened today. He wasn't a fast thinker and I wanted to keep him off balance.

"What you don't know," he continued, "is that when those cops grabbed Pete two young punks with copper written all over them tried to nail me and Larry at the same time. Only we saw them coming and took off real fast. Larry had to belt one of them to get away, but we made it. Then later we couldn't figure out how come Pete was grabbed so nice and how they tried to grab me and Larry at just the same time. It looks too much like a finger job, and the only finger we can come up with is you.

You walk clear away with our diamonds and nobody even looks at you. How come?"

"Are you blaming me because half the detectives in New York hang around the Jewelry Exchange? You paid me five hundred to cart that stuff around for you, just because you thought you might be picked up. You're known jewel thieves—those coppers probably have your mugs framed on their desks, you know that—then you call me a stoolie. Drop dead!"

Monk's head snapped up. I saw the red flush of anger creep up around his neck. His hand tightened on the gun. I knew I had gotten under his skin. My only hope was to make him angry enough to stop thinking.

"Too bad you said that, good buddy," he rasped. "Something else you don't know is that I saw one of those young coppers coming down on the train with us, so we're pretty sure it was a finger job. And even Pete didn't know where we had to meet you. So that leaves only you. Stand up, boy. Lock your hands behind you. I'll teach you some manners. You ever been pistol-whipped?"

I hadn't, but I'd seen some guys who had. Empty hulks with part of an ear gone, or their noses smashed in, or no cheekbone where cheekbones should be—and always something on the inside gone forever—walking dead men. Monk would have to kill me before he pistol-whipped me. I stood up shakily, a tight knot growing in my gut but ready for the coming battle. I backed slowly away from him.

"Get your hands behind your back," he ordered. He came in at me very slowly, a mean smile playing at his lips.

I wasn't afraid he'd shoot. I was his golden goose, or maybe diamond goose, and he wouldn't cook me—yet. But that automatic looked awfully big in his mitt. He waved it from side to side like a knife man, always coming closer. He feinted once, but I saw it in his eyes a second before, then I knew a real one was coming.

He brought around a roundhouse, but I was able to roll with it. It caught me over the ear, stinging more than hurting, but I let out a loud groan to make him think I was hurt bad. I'd have t take two or three like that before I went for him. He telegraphed the next one and I rolled with it again and ducked sideways. That one wasn't as bad, but I groaned louder.

"Shut up, stoolie," he snarled.

He swung viciously again, but missed completely when I ducked way down. My hand touched something behind me and I knew I had a weapon. It was one of those big, square, glass ash trays, Woolworth's best, and it weighed at least a half pound.

I had to get him crazy mad to get the gun away from him. "All right, Monk," I yelled, "I tipped

the cops, but I've got the diamonds. You can have them, but don't hit me again! I can't stand it!"

His face contorted, his eyes seemed to get red, but his greed won. He brought the gun back for a mighty roundhouse that would have clubbed me through the floor. I ducked down, grabbed the ash tray with my right hand and swung it around as hard as I could, right for his eyes. I let it go like a discus inches from his face, then crouched down, ready to spring for his gun hand.

He didn't have a chance. It must have looked like a bomb to him. It caught him right under his left eye, a sharp corner gouging upward, then it broke against his face bones, the ragged edges cutting across his flesh like a cleaver. The gun flew out of his hand as he jerked his arm up. I dove for it. He stumbled backwards without a sound, blood spurting from his face. Then he fell back and his head cracked against the edge of the bureau, making an ominous, crunching sound. I thought I knew what that meant.

I had his gun in my hand as I went to look at him. His face was a mess, but not bad enough to kill him. But I knew he was dead. I felt the back of his head—it was as soft and pulpy as a rotten melon. I'd heard that same sound in Korea when a rifle butt crashed down on an unprotected skull. Monk had no more worries about his hot diamonds now. Or anything else. I laid his gun on top of the bureau, then felt in my pockets for the recorder switch and shut it off.

In a way I felt sorry for him. His temper had caused his death, just as it had caused most of his troubles in his life. Monk Saunders was probably the best safe man in the country, a sort of real life Jimmy Valentine. I don't think the safe or vault was ever made that he couldn't open, given enough time. He could almost make those hunks of steel talk for him. But his temper and the queer idea he had that he was a tough guy were his undoing. If he played it as a loner he could have opened up safes forever and lived like a prince on what he got out of them.

Monk and his two partners gave us a hard time over the years, that was for sure. I work for one of the biggest insurance companies in the business, and have the fancy title of Chief Investigator of Frauds, but I don't mind that because the salary and extras are pretty fancy too. For the past five years I've been trying to nail these three guys—now there were only two of them.

The first time I ever saw Monk was three years ago, when I was stuck in the maximum security cell block in Sing Sing, just before he arrived. He'd been convicted of a felonious assault rap—his temper again. He'd been celebrating the success of a big job and got in a fight with a legitimate john in a bar and almost killed him. The john hap-

pened to have a cop friend right there with him, so Monk didn't have a chance to beat that one. We were cell neighbors for a week then, until Monk moved on to his permanent jail, but we hardly noticed each other. He was up for parole a little sooner than expected, just a few weeks ago, and I'd been pulled off an investigation in Los Angeles and flown back in a jet to sit in the same cell Monk had seen me in three years before. Then we'd struck up a sort of acquaintance, an acquaintance that led to me being hired by Monk and getting into the enemy camp.

Monk never knew it, but all during those three years in the can he'd been like a bug on a slide with guys watching him and studying him. The insurance companies even had psychologists exercising with him in the prison yard to find out what made him tick. I read all the reports, that's why I felt sorry for him.

His body was partly blocking the door, I tugged his legs out of the way so that I would be able to get out, then searched him quickly. He didn't have much on him, but I did find a folded paper in his inside jacket pocket which made me whistle in surprise as I read it. It was a list of fifteen jewelry houses in the city—five or six I recognized as active fences—some of them big, respectable businesses, supposedly above suspicion. But I imagine if the stakes were high enough some of these guys would come down off their pedestals to do business with Monk.

I had no time now to stay and explain things to the Homicide boys, that would have to come later, if I got through with the rest of the night. I wasn't worried about Monk's friend outside, he would just be a hood to watch the back way out of the hotel—he wouldn't even see me leave through the front. I unlocked the door and slipped into the hall, then walked down the one flight and through the lobby. My bill was paid a week in advance so I got a big, *Good evening, Mr. Young,* from the manager at the desk. When the cops came for Monk's body that guy would hate me forever. The one thing no one could ever do was die in a hotel in New York, even a third-rate joint like this. It was the unforgivable sin.

In the street I decided to walk to a drugstore a block away to call my office. Among other things I had to start the wheels moving for Monk's funeral, and I was anxious to get the latest reports on his partners.

I hadn't gone thirty feet when two fellows stopped me. They looked like college kids. Anyone standing more than ten feet away would think they were just that and that they were asking for directions. Only they weren't college kids, they were two of my best men. I had almost forgotten how closely

Monk had been followed.

"Bill, Monk went in that joint twenty minutes ago," Jim Trevor, the taller one, said to me.

He was holding a card out for me to look at. I took the card, looked at it, and pointed down the street and started making gestures.

"Yeah, I know," I said. "But you can forget about Monk now. He's dead."

Jim Trevor whistled.

"Dead, huh?" Bob Moran said. "You know we got four Safe and Loft Squad guys floating around here with us? You want us to tell them?"

I was still gesturing. "Stall them for five or ten minutes. I can't stay here now. If we don't break this case tonight, especially after this, we can forget all about it."

Both of them were looking at me with funny expressions. Then I realized what it was. Leaving the scene of an automobile accident was kindergarten stuff compared to what I was doing—walking away from a stiff who had died at my hand. And I also realized what a very dim view the Police Department and the District Attorney's Office would take. There are certain things you just can't do, only now I had to, I had no choice.

"Don't worry about it, I'll try to straighten it out later," I said to them. "Monk tried to gun-whip me, I slugged him and he cracked his head open. He's in my room. Take those cops in five minutes from now. Ask them to keep it away from the reporters as long as they can."

"Okay, Bill," Jim Trevor said. "Only those boys are going to be a little steamed at you for walking out on the party."

"Yeah, I know, but I can't help it, Jim. If we can hand them the other two alive and with the right evidence they'll get over their mad —I think." I waved to them and hurried down the block, hoping I wouldn't be stopped by any of the detectives staked out on Monk. It wouldn't be so easy to get away from one of them.

We have a perfect working arrangement with the police, especially here in New York. The second and third grade detectives are all bucking for promotions, the first grade men just want glory, and the bosses want glory and prestige and politically important friends among the big businessmen in the city. We aren't selfless wonders, but when we break a big case it means moving up in a league where they pay the same kind of dough the top ballplayers get, and it's done quickly. So we give the cops all the glory and credit and everything else they want and keep quiet when the reporters flock around them to find out how they broke a case.

I made the corner and then thought I'd better do my telephoning a little further away. There was a bar five blocks down with two booths off in a corner that I could

use. I hurried along, my mind racing at what I could possibly do to wrap this case up. I hadn't been kidding when I told Trevor and Moran it would have to be finished tonight or not at all.

One of the two other men we wanted wasn't much of a problem, he was really in a box. Monk's friend Larry was Larry Coster, a two-time loser, both for buglary raps. He'd gone bad after he was discharged from the Navy after the big war—those two convictions represented his first efforts in crime. After that he learned fast and it didn't take him long to turn in to a real pro, especially after he met Monk. Larry Coster had been a radar and communications man in the Navy, and I think he knew as much or more about electronics as any engineer.

Robbing a safe today isn't just a mechanical job. The average vault or safe is wired with all kinds of burglar alarms and detection devices. Even a third-rate set up has some kind of wires hooked up to it and if they aren't handled right by safe men the cops join the party in two or three minutes. Larry's job was to neutralize the alarm system on a job, and he did it every time perfectly and easily, giving Monk all the time in the world to play with the safe.

A pair like Monk and Larry could cause all kinds of trouble, and they did, but neither of them had the brains to pull off really big jobs. That's where the guy they called the Boss came in. His name was Leon Schell, and that's about all we knew about him. I'd read all the European dossiers on him and everything else, but the only real information we had was his name. He'd come out of Europe after the war with a valid American passport issued by the American Military Command in Berlin and had caused us nothing but headaches since. But there was never the slightest shred of evidence to tie him up to any of more than a dozen big jobs he'd pulled, all we knew was that no one but Leon Schell could do them.

I'd only seen photographs of the guy, but I'm convinced that he must have been a general on the German High Command, he had that kind of a mind. No detail ever escaped him, nothing was ever left to chance, the planning on his jobs was fantastic. He'd work for months or even years setting up a job, then clean the place out, and vanish without ever leaving the slightest clue except the absolute perfection of the job.

After we'd been taken four or five times we thought we'd spotted the only weak point in their set-up. Even three guys like that sometimes needed other help on the jobs, either before they hit or during the actual job. We'd caught up with several of them and had learned that Monk always hired them and paid them off for their work, what-

ever it happened to be. That figured, because Monk was the only one of the three who had a thorough knowledge of the racket guys and thugs who were available. That's how come I'd been elected Monk's neighbor in Sing Sing Prison.

That paid off. Monk had been out of touch for three years and Larry Coster and Leon Schell must have been waiting months for him to get out. I got out the same week as Monk and he needed someone in a hurry so I got the job. He'd come to see me at my cover job as a counterman in a cheap restaurant and made a meet with me in my hotel room three days before this last job, paying me in advance and telling me to wait for a phone call to go to work.

From the moment Monk got out of prison we'd had three of the best men in the country tailing him, but after that we doubled the cover—he couldn't possibly duck away, we thought. Only Leon Schell had that one figured out too. The afternoon before the job Monk took a cab out to Newark Airport, jumped into a waiting helicopter, and vanished into a low fog over the airport. Three days later we found the pilot sobering up in Poughkeepsie. It seemed that a big, luscious blonde met them there when they landed but her boy friend hadn't come along as she expected and she was so disappointed she let the pilot comfort her in a local motel for three days. Then she took off too.

So we had nothing to do but sit and wait it out. There was a holiday weekend coming up, with Monday the holiday. Most jewelry houses stayed open for business all day Saturday, but even so, figuring a six p.m. closing, that left sixty-three hours for them, until nine a.m. Tuesday morning. And they could be anywhere at all in the United States. We sent out a general alarm bulletin to all members of the jewelers' associations because that's all we could do, but we knew most of them wouldn't even be seen until Tuesday.

On Tuesday morning we didn't have long to wait though. The call came through at 9:15. It was almost unbelievable. They'd taken one of the biggest firms right here in New York, and oh, brother, how they had taken it. Normally this house kept in the neighborhood of a half million dollars worth of stones in their vault, but a few weeks before they had received a consignment of uncut diamonds from the African mines worth at least a million. The underwriters decided to keep the stuff there until it was cut, for maximum safety, because this house had one of the most modern, burglar-proof, security vaults in the city. Or at least it was until then.

The robbery was a masterpiece, no question about that. The jewelry firm occupied an entire five story stone and brick building on Fifth Avenue. They went in through the

brick wall of the adjoining building in the sidestreet on the second floor level. This was more of Leon Schell's planning. The second floor of the adjoining building was rented out a year before to a rug importing firm, a perfect cover for them. Over weeks and months they had removed the double row of bricks in that building and a single row of bricks in the abutting jewelry building for an almost door-sized opening. The work on their side was concealed from accidental discovery by keeping a bank of metal clothing lockers against that wall. When they were ready to break in all they had to do was wait for a heavy truck to pass by and shove what was left of the wall in on the jewelry house side.

That let them in to a small office on the second floor of the jewelry building. The gaping hole in the wall couldn't be seen from the street, but to prevent anyone in the building across the street from noticing it they pasted a blue cloth over the opening—the same shade light blue as the walls. And every bit of dirt and debris was cleaned up; we found it all in trash barrels in the adjoining building.

The rest of the second floor, all of the first floor, and the part of the first basement where the vault was located, were proected by burglar-proof, invisible infra-red light beams. Each light source was focused on a light sensitive relay across the room—any interruption of the invisible light would turn in an alarm. The only trouble was that the guy who designed this setup never had basic training in any of the services where he had to crawl on his belly with his back end down to keep under a curtain of live machine gun fire. The light beams were installed in doubles, one at waist height, the other at knee height. I suppose the idea of the doubles was that if one set failed the store still had the protection of the other. But all you had to do to avoid the alarm system was crawl around on the floor under it, which is just what these guys did.

In the first basement, across from the vault, was the electronic marvel that made a burglary impossible. A television camera kept its unblinking eye focused on the vault door; any living thing that entered its range would show up on the viewing screen in the control room of the detective agency that provided security for the jewelry house. This closed-circuit television setup was really great, it did away with the necessity of having watchmen on the premises, and would work for you for as many hours as you wanted at a single stretch. A couple of dozen banks, brokerages houses, and jewelers in the city had them installed. I'd seen the rows of viewing screens in the control room, each screen identified with the name and location of the camera installation. If anything showed on the screen all you had to do was call Police

Headquarters and the cops would have the building surrounded in minutes. An extra bonus was that you could punch a key to take a tape record of what was going on.

Only it wasn't foolproof. Leon Schell figured out a way to beat it. They brought in a canvas sheet, probably rolled up to get it under the light beams, then unrolled it and stretched it on a collapsible metal wire frame and snapped it up into position in front of the camera eye. Painted on the side facing the camera was a perfect picture of the vault door and the surrounding part of the basement room. Except for the momentary flick on the viewing screen when they snapped the canvas into position—the kind of flick you'd get on any television screen when an automobile passes—there was nothing to indicate that there were three men in the room in front of the vault. To make certain that no stray light struck the back of the canvas they hung a heavy black cloth on it.

There were four infra-red light beams crisscrossing the area immediately in front of the vault door. Larry Coster took care of them by rigging up new invisible light sources close to the relays so that the light beam was never interrupted; then he neutralized the alarm system on the vault itself. He hooked up relays and induction coils and pulse generators all over the side of the vault and then tied them in to the lead in wires. When he was finished they could have carted the thing off to Central Park if they wanted to without setting off the vault alarm.

All that might have taken them as long as five hours—they still had almost sixty hours to get it open. But Monk didn't need that long, it might have taken him somewhere between twenty and thirty hours, counting resting and eating time, as nearly as we could figure it. That meant that they were probably finished shortly after midnight Sunday evening leaving them a day and a half to get out and away.

And they cleaned the vault out, but good. They took everything, cut and uncut diamonds, mounted stones and necklaces, rings, bracelets, and even several dozen diamond studded watches. The insured value of the loot was over a million and a half, they could probably get close to a million for it if they could get rid of it in the European market.

When we were reconstructing the job Tuesday morning we got our only lucky break. Somehow, impossibly, Larry Coster had left a full set of fingerprints on the front surface of the vault door. There was no way to understand that kind of stupidity or carelessness after what they had done, but whatever the reason, they were there. It was a blessing for us, and it hung up Larry Coster for this job high and dry. The only possible explanation I could come up with was that he

was smoking or eating when Monk swung the big door open. If he was smoking or eating he probably had his glove off his right hand, and in the excitement of seeing what they had he accidentally touched the front of the door. I didn't care why, I was just mighty grateful that he did.

That simplified things tremendously for us. We knew who pulled the job, and, as important, we knew who didn't. The Safe and Loft Squad detectives were all for putting out a nation wide alarm for Larry Coster, but I was able to talk them out of it. If we did that, it would tip our hand. The only chance to get the three of them was to let them think we were completely stumped. The newspapers carried a subdued account of it, with no figure mentioned, and only that the police had commenced an investigation.

Knowing how Leon Schell's mind worked, and how he planned things, the logical thing to expect them to do was to try to run the stuff out of the country. There were several reasons for this, but the most important one was money. If they could get the stuff to the European market they would net twice as much as they could here. But getting it out of he United States and then into Europe wasn't easy, only someone like Schell would try it. For the amount involved we were almost certain he would.

There are only two ways to move stolen jewelry across borders. One way, of course, is to smuggle it, but it was almost inconceivable that they would try to do that—it's much too risky and uncertain. If they were caught either leaving here or entering any foreign country they would blow the whole job, netting exactly nothing but trouble for their efforts.

The other way is the way that would appeal to Leon Schell. If they could enlist the services of a man big enough in the jewelry industry to move it for them, get it through customs on both sides as a legitimate shipment by disguising it with false documents to cover its movement, they would be in the clear. It meant an extra cut, but they would not only be a lot safer but still ahead in the final take from the job. And because Monk had hired me to carry for them several days before I was positive that's what they planned to do.

That Tuesday afternoon I sweated it out at my cover job in the restaurant, watching the minute hands of the wall clock crawl around, hoping desperately that Monk would contact me. He did, just before six o'clock. He didn't say much over the phone, just told me to meet him Thursday afternoon at one thirty at the Manhattan end of the George Washington Bridge near the Eighth Avenue Subway entrance. That phone call started things rolling.

The Safe and Loft cops wanted to grab Monk and Larry Coster on sight when they appeared Thursday afternoon, but I talked them out of it, after a lot of wrangling. I pointed out that the most important thing was to recover the jewelry, whether they liked it or not, and that after we had the stuff back they could go around locking anybody up they wanted to, but they couldn't spoil our chances at getting it back. Monk could be trying a dry run, with Corn Flakes or soap powder in a bag instead of jewelry, and I wasn't taking any chances on that. I also pounded away on the fact that Larry Coster was the only one of the three we had any evidence against, and if they grabbed Monk too early they'd blow the case against him and we'd probably never even see Leon Schell. Finally they agreed to let me be the general, and we set up an elaborate trap.

Relays of my men and city detectives were to pick up the trail when I met Monk. I wasn't sure that Larry Coster would be with him, but I thought he probably would be. Leon Schell was a big question mark, that much dough might make him come, but his cunning would tend to keep him in the background. There were to be no arrests until they got a definite signal from me; but part of the plan was to have city detectives scare off Monk and whoever was with him if I had possession of the jewels so that I could get away from them with the stuff— again only at a signal from me.

That part of the plan worked perfectly. Monk and Larry Coster pulled up in a cab right on time. They had another man with them, but it wasn't Leon Schell. Monk was carrying a slightly oversized attache case, of dark brown leather. They hurried down the subway steps and waited for me on the halfway landing, out of sight of the street. Monk handed me the attache case and told me to follow Pete, the third man, wherever he went, and not to talk to any of the three of them for any reason. We separated, and I tagged along after Pete. It was easy to figure out what his part was. He was the steerer for the fence. If anything did go wrong they knew he couldn't tell the cops anything because he really didn't know what it was all about; and he would save the fence from any embarrassment of publicly meeting with known jewel thieves. My part was supposed to be the hot seat— if the cops grabbed me they'd just throw me on the griddle and keep turning me over until I was one well done hamburger.

We rode downtown on the subway and I saw three of my men in the same car—it was pretty crowded, even at that time of day. When we got off at Radio City I knew they were heading for the jewelry center in the city, and flashed signals for them to grab Pete and get

him out of the way and to scare off Monk and Larry Coster. When I got upstairs and saw I was clear of them I hailed a cab and had him run me over to Grand Central Station. We had only gone a block when a detective cruiser fell in right behind the cab as an escort—the cops must have been using walkie-talkie radios. When I got to the station they piled out of their car and fell in place around me as I headed for the elevator to ride up to the floor our special office was on. Insurance companies maintain special security offices at all railroad stations and airline terminals for the use of jewelry salesmen and carriers. If they ever need to leave any valuables in a safe place overnight or longer the facilities are always available to them. The one in Grand Central is rather large—three big rooms with four armed guards always in attendance. Ten minutes after I got there the place was swarming with people. The president of our insurance company, along with his top brass, more than a dozen detectives, from Assistant Chief Inspector O'Leary down through Inspectors, Captains, and Lieutenants, a couple of Assistant District Attorneys, and some of my own men.

We were naturally anxious to see what we had in the attache case and tried to open it in a hurry, but that didn't prove easy. Under the brown leather the entire case was made of a high grade steel. The two locks at either end looked ordinary enough but they were far from ordinary. I'm no lock expert, but I'd never seen finer ones in my life. One of the detectives knew a locksmith with a shop nearby, on Third Avenue. He went out and brought him back in fifteen minutes. That guy tried the locks for a half hour before he finally threw down his tools in disgust.

"I never seen nothin' that tough to open," he said. "The only thing I can do is use diamond pointed drills on them."

When he started on the locks an idea started to form in my mind—I thought I might be able to use these locks somehow to help snare Leon Schell. The idea wasn't clear yet, but I didn't want the locks damaged.

"No," I told him. "Is there anyone you know who's a specialist at something like this. Someone who could get them open without damaging them?"

He did know of a specialist, probably the top man in the whole field. According to him this man could open locked chests and vaults even in sunken ships. His place of business was up in Harlem, so Inspector O'Leary called the Harlem Precinct and told them to pick this man up and run him down to us in a radio car. While we waited you could feel the tension building up in the room.

"I'm an old Navy man myself," Inspector O'Leary announced.

"Just get me a bigger hammer and I'll open the damn thing up."

I couldn't help smiling. Inspector O'Leary is a big, brawny Irishman. I don't know how old he is, but his hair is jet black, despite the wrinkles in his face. His manner is pleasant, but gruff. His eyes are truly remarkable, they're sky blue but as hard and penetrating as chipped steel. He could look right through you. He had the reputation of being a good friend but a terrible man to cross, and I think that this reputation was deserved, because I noticed that all his subordinates, even the men only a rank under him, gave him a lot of respect.

He asked me why I insisted on not damaging the locks or the case, so I told him how I thought I could use the case to wrap up Leon Schell—if I could get to him. His eyes got a little twinkle in them, they looked almost human, and he nodded his approval.

"It will be dangerous, I'll tell you that," he said. "But you've done wonders on this case so far. If the stuff is in that bag I'll say go ahead if you're sure you know what you're doing."

The master locksmith came in then, and he was really a character. He was over sixty with a shiny bald head fringed with gray tuft, and a happy, absolutely beaming smile. Right then he was the only happy guy in the room. I told him what we wanted and he went to work like a surgeon performing a delicate brain operation. While he worked over the locks he sang almost continually—German lieder, Italian and French arias, American and Argentine cowboy songs, anything and everything. In between he told us about Bach and Mozart and Wagner while we were biting our nails. He got the first one open in about forty minutes, then started on the other one.

"Now it will be quicker," he said. "I think I know who made this case—there is only one man I know of and he died five years ago. He was a true craftsman, a shopkeeper in Dusseldorf, Germany. Nobody else could make work like this."

I wondered how I could tie that to Leon Schell, probably with a little digging it wouldn't be too hard. But it wasn't enough.

When he finally got the other lock open and threw back the lid of the case I breathed a long sigh of relief. It was almost all there, dazzling in its massed brilliance. By then several officials of the jewelry firm that was robbed were there. They had a check list and started taking an inventory of what we had. Except for a few watches and some smaller stones we had the whole thing.

The locksmith was beaming more than ever and all ready to break into a song, so I told him what I wanted him to do in a hurry, and he went back to work.

I had sent out for some fake jewelry to a firm which specialized in stuff like that and they had sent quite a bit of it down to us. When the attache case was ready I started packing it with the false glassware. This stuff wasn't junk though, it was so good only an expert would be able to spot it as phoney—an expert like Leon Schell. To make it look as good as I could I asked for and got the diamond studded watches back from the jewelry firm officials and put them back in the case the way they were. Then the locksmith carefully closed the case and locked both of the locks again. I was all ready to start what I had to do. I told my men to get back to our office and wait there, then started out with the attache case in my right hand. Hardly anyone noticed me, but I did see Inspector O'Leary watching me with those cold blue eyes. He only nodded to me.

I went down in the elevator to the main floor, walked through the terminal until I came to a row of public lockers, slid a dime in the slot and put the attache case in and closed and locked the door, just as I told Monk a few hours later. Only I didn't mail myself the key, that was still in my pocket. I only needed one more thing. I cabbed down to Radio Row on Cortland Street to see a friend of mine who ran an electronics parts store and asked him if he could rig up one of the new miniature recording machines with the tape in a cartridge so that I could conceal it on my body. He thought he could and promised to have it ready in a couple of hours.

While I waited I kept in close touch with my office and got the reports of the men who were still trailing Monk and Larry Coster around. They'd separated when they'd been scared off in the subway at Radio City, each of them taking off alone and riding around in the subways for more than an hour, but then they both started making telephone calls. I suppose when nothing else happened to them and they calmed down a little they thought they were in the clear. They must have contacted Leon Schell, because about two hours later they met in a downtown bar, then went for a long walk together, occasionally stopping off at drug stores to make phone calls. Once they made a long call in a street booth outside a filling station on the west side, each of them taking turns going in to the booth. It could only be Leon Schell they were talking to then—I would have given anything to see his face when he heard what happened.

I wanted to get them alone, first pick up Larry Coster and put him on ice, and then go to work on Monk, and I hoped, through Monk, to find out where Leon Schell was. We still had no idea where he could be.

When the transistor recorder was

ready for me I cabbed up to my room in the hotel, and that's where Monk upset my plans. I never dreamed he'd have anyone watching the joint for me, but he did and he had, and I couldn't get too mad at the guy for it because he'd paid for it with his life.

Now as I turned into the bar to make my call to the office I felt a terrible urgency, because if I couldn't get to Coster alone I might just as well forget about Leon Schell. I wanted to bag him as much as the jewelry firm wanted their stuff back. The office phone answered before the first ring was finished. It was Jack Finch—he'd been glued to that phone for the last ten hours. I told him briefly about what happened with Monk.

"Yeah, Bill, I heard," he said. "A Captain Carrara of the Safe and Loft Squad called a couple of minutes ago. He's in your hotel room now and he's plenty mad. He wants you to call him right away—he said that when Inspector O'Leary finds out what you did he'll chew him out until there's nothing left of him and he'll probably tear you apart personally when he catches up to you. Maybe you'd better call him fast, Bill."

"Sure," I said. "I'll call him right away. First give me a run-down on Larry Coster."

"He and Monk were together in a bar on West Eighth Street until a little over a half hour ago. Monk got a phone call and took off real fast—that's when he went over to your hotel room. Coster stayed there a few minutes then went out and made a phone call from a drug store on the corner. Then he took a cab up to an apartment hotel on West Sixty-Second Street. He went in there about ten minutes ago. We found out he's in Apartment 4E under his own name—Coster. That must be his voting address."

"Very funny. Give me the number on Sixty-Second Street," I told him. He did and I jotted it down.

"Look Jack," I said, "I'm going up there now to make the pinch. Before I do, though, I have to find out something from him, so I don't want you to let anyone know I called or where I'm going. You got that straight?"

There was a long pause before he answered. "You mean you're not going to telephone the cops, Bill? Those guys are really awfully mad at you for leaving Monk alone."

"I'll call as soon as I make the pinch," I said. "Just forget I called you now, understand?"

"Okay, Bill," he said. "I can follow an order. Good luck."

I hung up and went out and found a cab right away and told him to run me up to Sixty-First Street and Central Park West. I wanted to have the attache case with me when I went in to Larry Coster but there wasn't time for that now—I'd have to figure out another angle. I knew I wouldn't

be the general of this operation much longer. Maybe by now Inspector O'Leary had me down to buck private or worse. If my office knew where Coster was it was for sure the Safe and Loft Squad did too, and the same five minutes that Inspector O'Leary decided to grab Coster they'd go in and bag him and that would be the end of what I was trying to do. I was still determined to get Leon Schell no matter what chances I had to take to do it.

The cab pulled up to the corner of Sixty-First Street. I paid the driver and got out. My gun was at the office and I needed one now so I walked up towards Sixty-Second Street looking for one of my men. I saw him sitting at the wheel of a cab we used for tail jobs right on the corner of Sixty-Second Street. It was Harry Sloan and he was alone in the cab. He saw me coming through his mirror and slid open the cab door when he saw me head for the cab. I stepped into the back and sat hunched forward on the seat.

"He still in there?" I asked.

"Yeah, Bill. I followed him uptown and saw him go in the building. Then a couple of minutes later the light went on in that fourth floor room on the corner. He came to the window and I saw him good when he closed the blind." He pointed to the window he meant. There was still a light in the room.

"I haven't got time to fill you in on everything that's happened," I said. "I'm going in now and make the pinch, but first I have to see him alone and try to find out something. You got your gun on you?"

He nodded.

"Let me have it," I said.

He took it out of his shoulder holster and handed it back to me. I slid it under my belt, around on the left side.

"How many city detectives are there around here now?" I asked.

"Three or four that I know of. A couple of them are out behind an alley that leads into the back yards there. Why, Bill?"

"I'm in a mess with them, and I want to steer clear of them if I can," I said. "I'll make this as fast as I can, but if I get in any serious trouble, Harry, I'll try to smash that window. Come in fast then, but come in with a gun, and bring those cops with you. I'm not sure what this guy might try, he's certainly pretty upset and mad after what happened today. If I can bag him quietly, though, I'll call the office and have them contact you over your radio—keep it on. Then you can come in alone or with our guys, but leave the cops out of it until I can duck out. I don't want to see them if I can help it. You got that straight?"

"Whatever you say, Bill."

I got out of the cab and started for the entrance of the apartment building. I could feel that knot growing in my gut again. I walked

in and went right to the elevator and rode to the fourth floor. Apartment 4E was off to the right. I reached into my jacket pocket and turned on the switch of the transistor recorder. I didn't need any more evidence against Larry Coster, but you could never tell—it might come in useful. Then I pressed the doorbell button twice, two short ones.

In a couple of seconds a low voice came through the door. "Who is it?"

"Me, Bill. Bill Young," I said. "Monk just sent me up."

The door opened a little and he peered out at me. I could see the blue glint of an automatic at his waist. When he saw I was alone he opened the door wide enough for me to walk in. He stood off to the side of the door and then I didn't have any trouble seeing the gun.

He waved me into the room with it and shut and locked the door behind me. He kept the automatic right on my middle.

"Where's Monk?" he asked.

"Downstairs in his car," I told him. "He came to my hotel room and I gave him the suitcase with the stuff in it. He brought me out to his car and we rode up here. He couldn't find a place to park so he told me to come up here and get you. He said you should call the Boss to let him know he had the stuff and find out what he wants you to do."

I threw the whole can of bait at him—there was no time for stalling. I just hoped he took it. From here on I'd have to play it by ear.

"How come Monk didn't call me?" he asked. "He was supposed to call me here."

"How do I know? Maybe because he has no telephone in his car. Go down and ask him," I said.

Larry Coster was a bundle of nerves. His face was haggard and strained and he looked as if he had a few too many belts of liquor to keep himself under control. He searched my face with a hard, vicious look in his eyes.

"If I thought you were trying anything funny I'd let you have it right now," he said. He inched the gun a little higher. Now it was aimed at my heart.

"You guys make me sick," I said. I wanted to quiet him down, I didn't like that look in his eye, and he had the gun.

"You're the friendliest bunch I ever worked with. Every time I see one of you, you throw a gun on me. Monk even accused me of being a finger man."

"Are you?" he asked. His voice was deadly.

"Would I be here if I was? I try to work with you guys—duck cops all afternoon and worry about getting your stuff back to you—then go back to my hotel room where I figure Monk will be able to reach me and all I get are guns thrown at me. This is the last time I have anything to do with a bunch like

you. If I was a finger man I wouldn't be here, but there'd be cops swarming all over the place. Now if you want to shoot me go ahead, enjoy it. If not put that thing away. I'm getting out of here."

It worked. I breathed out nice and slow and felt the knot in my middle loosen as he shoved the gun in his hip pocket. He shook his head as if to clear it and rubbed his hands over his eyes.

"I'm sorry, Mac," he said. "It's just I can't take any chances. I'm nervous as a cat. You know what we have in that bag?"

"Yeah. Monk told me hot jewels," I said.

"Yeah, man, hot jewels. But you know how much? You know how much jewels is in there?"

"Must be a big deal to make you guys so jumpy," I said.

"It's big, man, so big I can't believe it almost. I never thought I'd be so lucky. That's why I went to pieces when those cops moved in on us today. At first we were sure you fingered us. Monk and I got separated, but then I met him later and we were plenty sore at you, but we talked to the Boss and he thought it over and a little later when we called him he said he wasn't so sure you were a pointer. The job we pulled was so big he thought the cops might just have a bad case of the heebie-jeebies and were going around grabbing everybody they even saw near the diamond center. We shouldn't have gone down there. Someplace out of New York would be better. That's what we'll do now. Maybe Philly or Miami."

That Leon Schell told them I wasn't a finger man was the best piece of news I'd had in hours—maybe he meant it and maybe he didn't—but it tipped the scales for me when I needed it most. Larry Coster lost some of the tense expression on his face, he was walking back and forth rubbing his hands together. His lips were parted in something that might be a smile, only it made him look like a hungry shark.

"Man, that is good news, we got away from those cops after all. I still can't believe I'm so lucky. When this is over I'll send you five big ones for your trouble today. How about a quick drink before we see Monk?"

"No thanks," I said.

"Maybe I had enough, too," he said. "Let's go meet Monk."

He reached for his topcoat on a chair. My heart started to beat faster. I spoke as casually as I could. My face was frozen.

"Oh, Monk wanted you to call the Boss. You want to call from here or someplace else?"

Everything hinged on this. He had to call from this room. If he went out the door now I'd never learn what I had to and I could kiss Leon Schell goodbye for keeps. But I couldn't let Coster even suspect how important this was. I

stood up and started for the door.

"Oh, yeah. I almost forgot. Maybe I better call him now. Wait a minute." He walked over to the telephone.

My heart kept on beating faster and faster. I could almost hear it in the stillness of the room. He picked up the instrument and started to dial. I held my breath—half closed my eyes. The tiny clicks came through clear and as loud as drumbeats to my ears. I burned them into my memory. 6-4-4-2-1.

Then I caught the last two digits and almost shouted for joy. I had it. I knew where Schell was now. I repeated the numbers to myself. I could never forget them.

I made a quarter turn and closed my hand around the gun in my belt and brought it down to my right side, out of Larry Coster's line of vision in case he should turn around to face me. My heart kept right on hammering hard. I wanted to end it quickly now—I just hoped the conversation wouldn't be long.

They didn't talk much. I heard Coster tell him briefly that Monk had found me and had the stuff back and was waiting for him downstairs. That news must have overjoyed Leon Schell, because then about all Larry Coster said was that they'd be over and bring me along—that he'd see him in twenty minutes or a half hour. He hung up without saying goodbye.

It was ridiculously easy then. He reached for his topcoat again and I levelled the gun at him.

"You won't need it right away, Coster," I said. "You're under arrest."

His face blanched, his eyes seemed to roll back in his head. His right arm made a slight motion for his back pocket where his gun was but stopped when I cocked my revolver.

"Your friend Monk Saunders is dead," I told him. "He wanted to play rough with me, and now he's dead. You try anything and you're dead too."

I saw fear come into his eyes.

"Put up both hands, real high, and turn around," I said.

He turned around slowly and I walked over to him and took the gun out of his back pocket and slipped it into my coat.

"Now lie down on the floor and keep your hands out in front of you, face down."

He got down on his hands and knees and then straightened out. He turned his head to look at me, his face an ugly mask of fear and hatred.

"Put your nose in the rug or I'll kick it off," I said.

He did, a wracking sob of anger and frustration shaking his body.

I backed up two steps to the telephone and picked it up with my left hand and dialed the operator and told her to get my office number. She told me in a syrupy voice that I could *obtain* that number by

dialing it. I said I had my dial finger on the trigger of a .38 Detective Special with the hammer cocked and it was aimed right at the head of a jewel thief and that I had killed one of his buddies less than an hour ago and didn't want to kill him unless I had to and would she please get the number. All the syrup left her voice and she stuttered all over the place but finally rang the office.

Jack Finch was still answering and he snapped it up.

"Jack, this is Bill Young," I said. "I've got Larry Coster on ice. Now listen carefully. Harry Sloan is parked in a cab on the corner—he's got his radio on waiting for a call from you. Call him on the air and tell him to get right up here. Coster is stretched out on the floor chewing the rug, he won't give me any trouble. Tell Harry to come up alone—he'll understand. Then wait five minutes or so and call the Safe and Loft Squad Office and tell them that Harry has Coster here and that they can pick him up and book him. I need that five minutes to get out of the building—I have a little errand to do. You got that clear?"

"Yeah, Bill, I got it clear. But wait a minute . . ."

I cut him short. "I can't wait, Jack. Every second counts for me now. I've got to hang up."

He yelled through the phone. "Don't hang up, Bill. It's an emergency. Inspector O'Leary called a couple of minutes ago and the air is still blue around here. He's down in his office in Police Headquarters and he said if he didn't hear from you in fifteen minutes he'd send out a general alarm for you on a murder charge. He was so mad he could hardly get the words out. You better call him right away, Bill, he's not fooling. And you know what the brass in this company would do if a thing like that hit the papers about one of their men."

"Okay, okay, Jack, I'll call him." I hung up and frowned.

I hadn't expected that strong a reaction from O'Leary—pinning me down to fifteen minutes ruined any chance I had of getting to Leon Schell. But Jack Finch was right. If a general alarm went out for me it would queer me but permanently with the brass in my company and every other company in the business. It wouldn't matter one bit whether I handed them Leon Schell wrapped in cellophane or a big red bow. I'd be out of work a long, long time.

I tried to think of something that would quiet O'Leary down, something that would keep him pacified for the little bit more time I needed. I knew I'd have to call him in the next ten minutes—that I couldn't avoid. The first thing he'd want to know was where I was so he could have a radio car pick me up—that I had to avoid. I got a very small idea.

I walked around Coster and stood in front of him so that he could see me by lifting his head a little.

"Coster, I want you to tell me where Leon Schell is now," I said. "You can help me a lot if you tell me where he is so I can pick him up. If you do maybe I can make things easier for you with the District Attorney or the Judge at your trial. How about it?"

If I knew anything at all about criminal psychology this was the worst possible way in the world to get information out of a guy like Larry Coster. There was only one answer I could get and I got it and it was just what I wanted.

"Don't make me laugh. You insurance dicks are the creepiest cops in the world. I wouldn't spit at you if you was in the middle of the ocean. You're so smart, go find him."

He glared at me, his shark teeth showing in a wicked grin.

"Okay, shove your face back in the floor," I said.

The doorbell sounded and I backed over to the entrance door. It was Harry Sloan and he had two of our men with him. He came in first with a big .38 Police Positive revolver in his hand.

"Spare I keep in the cab," he said when he saw me looking at it.

I took Larry Coster's automatic out of my pocket and handed it to him.

"The Safe and Loft guys will be up in five or ten minutes," I said. "Coster had this on him—they can add that to the charge. Hold him here and whatever you do don't let him near a phone and don't let him talk to anyone, anyone at all. Tomorrow he can get fifty lawyers if he wants to, but I don't want a peep out of him tonight. That's important, Harry."

"No talk. Okay, Bill," Harry said.

"You better put handcuffs on him," I said. "Oh, and one more thing, Bill. Give me the keys of the cab."

He handed them to me without saying anything, but gave me an odd look. Minutes were valuable to me now, and I needed the cab to get out of the neighborhood. I put the gun I had borrowed from Harry Slaon back under my belt and watched as one of the other men bent over Larry Coster and snapped the cuffs on him. My hand felt in my jacket pocket for the recorder switch and I turned it off. Coster had really tied up the case against himself by everything he had said—all he could possibly do now would be to plead guilty. I went out the door and downstairs.

Across the street from the entrance to the building there were two men standing under the street light. They stared hard at me as I came out and headed for the cab. Both of them had on gray hats and coats and so help me they looked like real grayhounds to me and for

a crazy moment I thought I was a rabbit and when someone pressed a button I'd have to start running around a track until one of them caught me. Well, O'Leary had the button in his hand and it was up to me to stop him from pressing it.

I drove the cab up a few blocks and turned west to Broadway and when I saw a big drugstore I parked it and went in to a phone booth. Now I had to get the information I needed. I got a lucky break. The Night Wire Chief at the telephone company office was a guy I knew—he didn't hesitate when I told him what I wanted. I gave him the number Larry Coster had dialed from his apartment.

"Call me back in about five minutes, Bill, and I should have the dope for you then," he said.

That only left Inspector O'Leary. I took a deep breath and called Police Headquarters and asked for his office. When I told the cop who answered who was calling I didn't have to wait for O'Leary. He almost came through the phone at me.

He had no trouble getting the words out now. He was icily sarcastic, his words hit me and stung me like a high-pressure needle shower. He went on for over a minute until I started to wonder if he were trying to trace the call, then I remembered it was practically impossible to trace a call over a dial system in a city.

". . . and now the Commissioner knows about it and if you think I'm going to cover you five minutes more you're out of your mind. I wouldn't care if you got back ten million dollars worth of jewelry today you had no right to leave that room when that man died. It's a felony and I personally will throw the book at you if you don't get right down here . . ."

When he slowed down a little I tried to tell him about Coster. That made it worse.

"Ah, yes. I just learned how truly heroic you were. You went right up there alone and placed him under arrest. I'm going to call the Mayor right away and have him proclaim a whole week's celebration for everyone in the city for such a great thing. But we have over twenty thousand men in the Police Department in New York and the dumbest cluck on the force could have done the same thing and probably better."

"Look, Inspector," I said. "You know why I went up there. I had to try to find out where Leon Schell is so we could get to him before he finds out about Monk. If he takes off we'll never find him. I thought . . ."

"Did you find out?"

"I asked him where Schell was," I told him truthfully. "He laughed at me, told me to find him myself."

"Do you know where Schell is?"

"No, Inspector, I honestly don't."

"Well, you don't have to worry about it. After your fine day's work

you should rest up a little. I'll put a couple of hundred of those twenty thousand men on the case and maybe they can do almost as good a job as you could do. Mind you, I only said maybe."

He was getting under my skin but I tried to reason with him.

"Inspector, you know that even if you do grab Schell it won't do any good. We only have a circumstantial case against him and he'd have a high-powered lawyer get it thrown out before we even went to trial. We have to get something on him to tie him directly to this job, and you know I'm the only one who can possibly get close enough to him to do it. You've got to let me try."

"No! Absolutely not, Young. Murder is still a more serious crime than robbing a safe. I don't care if we ever convict Leon Schell. I want you in so we can clear up this Saunders death."

"He tried to gun-whip me," I said. "When I fought back and hit him with an ash tray I cut his face open and he fell back and cracked his skull. It was self defense. I certainly didn't murder him."

His voice became even more sarcastic. "I know that, Young. Believe it or not I did get a report from the men up there. But I'm only a dumb cop, remember? To me any death by violence is murder, until a Grand Jury decides otherwise. So all you have to do is make a sworn statement to a District Attorney and then tell your story to a Grand Jury—if they believe it then it's self defense. But you're not supposed to tell me about it over a telephone. That's why I want you in—*now!*"

I still wanted a chance at Leon Schell. I was willing to plead.

"Please, Inspector. All I need is an hour, maybe two. I have an idea that I think might work. I want to . . ."

"Where are you now?" he interrupted.

I gave him a location fifteen blocks away.

"Wait there," he said. "I'll send a radio car right over to pick you up. Don't leave there, you understand?"

"I'm sorry, Inspector, but I want Leon Schell convicted. I have to leave."

He had a lot of trouble getting the words out then, but when they came they were five times as loud as before.

". . . and so help me, Young, if you leave there, I'll ruin you. I'll indict you for everything I can find. I'll put a general alarm out for you for murder . . ."

I'd have to take my chances on that. I put the receiver back on the hook gently. The booth wasn't hot but my face and neck were wet from perspiration. I took out my handkerchief and dried off and lit a cigarette.

Inspector O'Leary wasn't bluffing when he said he could ruin

me. I knew it and he knew I knew it. I'd been called in before the Board of Directors of my company a couple of times on cases and knew just what I could expect from them. I don't think one of them ever had to work for a living. The only thing they did was get enough education so the family fortunes would never shrink during their lifetimes. Maybe their fathers or grandfathers or great-grandfathers piled up the family fortunes in the beginning by running dope or smuggling or maybe a little white slavery here and there but of course that was all forgotten now and they were oh so eminently respectable and super honest it was disgusting. And heaven help any dumb employee like me who ever got himself in trouble by cutting a legal corner now and then or who got himself featured on the wrong side of a front page newspaper story. It would shock them silly—so silly they'd fire you in five minutes and see to it that you never went back to work with any of their cousins who ran other companies the same way. Okay, so I'm dumb and stubborn, but I was still going after Leon Schell.

I fished up another dime and called the Night Wire Chief back. He had the information for me and I jotted it down. The telephone that Larry Coster had dialed was listed to a Sandra LaCoeur in Apartment 21 in a fancy Sutton Place apartment building. With an improbable name like that she'd have to live in a fancy joint. I didn't much care where she lived. That's where Schell was and that's where I was going.

There was only one more thing I had to do. Now I needed the attache case with the junk jewelry in it, so I went out and got a cab on the corner and gave the driver a ten dollar bill and told him to get me to Grand Central Station as fast as he could. The guy was a real jockey and for once I got my money's worth.

I half ran through the main waiting room to the bank of lockers where the case was, thankful I hadn't told O'Leary I'd left it there. If he knew that he'd have about ten guys waiting for me. I got the case out of the locker and half ran for the exit on the east side of the building. The clock over the information desk showed me it was almost a half hour since Coster had made his call. It would take me at least another ten minutes to get up to Sutton place. That wasn't good, but it couldn't be helped.

The second cab driver was better than the first guy. He got me to the front of the building in nine minutes flat, but I had him roll past and leave me out at the corner. I walked back slowly, looking the place over. It was a fancy place, alright. The entrance doors were all glass and chrome. The lobby walls were all white marble that gleamed softly under the indirect lighting. The

rugs inside were ankle deep. There was no doorman—either the management was saving money or he was off for a beer. A big directory board with a house phone hanging next to it was back near the elevators. S. LaCoeur, Apartment 21, was printed in gold letters under where it said Second Floor. The elevators were self service jobs. I stepped in and punched 2, then felt in my jacket pocket for the recorder switch and turned it on again—this was where I really needed this gadget.

Apartment 21 was almost right across from the elevator. I stepped across and pressed the button twice and wondered what kind of a gun Leon Schell would have on me when he opened the door.

He opened it almost immediately, without even looking through the interviewer and he had nothing in his hands. His eyes flickered momentarily in surprise when he saw me standing there alone, then narrowed as they swept over the attache case in my right hand.

"Are you Leon Schell?" I asked him.

"Yes." There was no expression on his face but his eyes were as sleepily alive as a lion's.

"I'm Bill Young," I said. "Monk Saunders and Larry Coster sent me up here. They told me to give you this bag."

"Oh. Won't you come in?" He held the door open a little wider and moved to the side for me.

"Sure," I said.

I went in and heard him close the door behind me. I placed the attache case on a small upholstered chair near the door and looked around. It was a beautiful apartment—obviously a woman's—with everything in good taste and very, very expensive. Just ahead of the small entrance foyer we were in was a dropped living room. Several lamps were on and a large console radio, a deluxe Hi Fi job, was turned on, playing classical music very softly. There was a little hallway at the far left end of the living room, but all I could see was a closed door—probably the bedroom. A kitchen and dinette were off the foyer to the right. I didn't see any sign of the woman.

"I expected Monk and Larry along with you," Schell said in a mild voice.

I shrugged my shoulders and put a dumb look on my face.

"They drove me over here," I said. "All they told me to do was bring the bag up to you and tell you they'd be up in a little while."

"Strange," he muttered.

I could almost see the wheels spinning furiously behind those bland eyes. He was a big man, much bigger than I expected from his passport photograph and description. He had twenty or thirty pounds on me and was an inch or two taller, and I'm not exactly small. I wasn't expecting exactly a bald professor type, but somehow,

maybe because of his reputation as a brain, I was surprised at his physical appearance. He might be near forty, but he looked ten years younger and as if he'd be right at home enjoying himself in any kind of a barroom brawl.

"Well, I guess I'm through for the day," I said. "I sure earned my dough on this deal—ducking cops all afternoon . . ."

I took a couple of steps towards the door and reached for the knob. No matter how calm this guy looked on the outside, he had to be upset about letting a million and a half get kicked around on him, even if he did think he had it back now. I had to stay there, but I thought he might bite on a double in reverse. If I seemed anxious to go, he'd want me to stay.

"No rush," he said. "Why not stick around until Monk and Larry get up? I can fix you a drink while we're waiting.

"Thanks," I said. "Maybe I could use one."

He picked up the attache case from the chair and walked down the two steps into the living room to a large portable bar next to the radio, set the case down, and pulled open the front of the bar. I could see the glistening porcelain front of a small refrigerator tucked under the bar.

"Anything special?" he asked.

"Make it Scotch on the rocks," I said.

He fixed two drinks with his back to me, and I watched him closely. Maybe I could have taken him then and maybe I couldn't. With all the little crystal mirrored surfaces on the bar he was probably studying me closer than I was studying him. He was fully dressed except for his suit jacket—instead he was wearing something I think is called a smoking jacket, but I'd never seen one before except on an old TV movie. This one was dark maroon in color, with a black velvet collar. It came down a little further than a suit jacket and had two big pockets in the front. I thought he had something in the right one but it looked too small to be a gun. He turned and handed me my drink.

"Monk tell you what was in that bag?" he asked.

I noticed that he kept his drink in his left hand. His right hand went into the right pocket of the jacket and closed around something and stayed there. So it was a gun.

"Yeah," I said. "It's hot jewelry, isn't it?"

He nodded. "We thought you took off with it in all the excitement today. It was mighty nice of you to go back to your hotel and wait for Monk. Most guys would just disappear if they had a chance like that."

I was on mighty dangerous ground and I knew it. This was something I had to explain satisfactorily to Leon Schell or forget

about getting any direct evidence on him, and maybe forget about living. But I had thought a lot about it and was ready for him.

"Maybe," I said. "Only hot jewelry isn't my line. It's too hard to handle and too hard to get rid of unless you have the right contacts. And I didn't want you guys gunning for me."

Schell was far from a dummy, I couldn't tell from his eyes if he bought it or not, but I thought I could sense a slight relaxation in his body.

"Speaking of guns," he said, "what do you think of this?"

He took his right hand out of the pocket and I saw his fist closed around one of those small calibre European models. He didn't aim it at me exactly, it was just pointed in my general direction. I didn't say anything.

"Marvelous piece of workmanship," he said. "I don't like your clumsy American arms at all. I can almost hide this in the palm of my hand but it's deadly under fifty feet. You know I practise a great deal with it in my spare time—I lay empty beer or soda bottles on their sides and try to shoot through the necks of the bottles and knock the bottoms off from forty or fifty feet. I can do that seven out of ten times."

"So you're a good shot," I said. I was trying to figure out what he was up to.

"Do you have a weapon on you now?" he asked.

Now I knew. He was a pro, all right. I didn't want him frisking me—if he ran his hands over my legs he couldn't miss the recorder parts taped to my thighs.

"Yeah. I got a little nervous today so I borrowed this one from a friend of mine." I pushed my jacket aside and showed him the butt of Harry Sloan's .38 stuck in my belt.

"May I see it?" he said.

"Sure."

I pulled it out, being careful to keep it pointed to the floor, and handed it to him. His gun was two feet away from my nose, and it was aimed directly at it. He put his drink down on the bar.

"This is typically American," he said as he took it. "It's just like your cars and your houses and everything else—much too big. It's clumsy and inefficient and not nearly as accurate as my gun. Don't you agree?"

I shrugged. I didn't know what to say. I was beginning to think Schell was a bit of a weirdie—this was really going the long way round to lift a gun off a guy. He backed away from me, then half turned around and walked to the far side of the room, where the little hallway was, and laid my gun on top of an end table. He put his own gun back in his jacket pocket but kept his hand on it. Then he motioned to me to sit in a chair near the bar, picked up his drink, and sat in another chair across

from me.

"May as well relax and enjoy your drink," he said. "If you don't mind I'll leave your gun over there. I don't like people I don't know too well to be armed around me, it makes me uncomfortable. Now tell me what happened today—everything."

This wasn't going the way I wanted it to, but there wasn't much I could do about it. I didn't care about the gun, but I wanted his voice on the tape, not mine, and I didn't want his opinions about the size of American guns, automobiles, or houses.

I told him almost the same thing I told Monk, only I didn't say anything about leaving the attache case in a public locker—instead I told him I went into a movie house until it got dark so it would be safer to go back to my hotel to wait for Monk. And I told him the time Monk arrived there was a half hour earlier than the time he had really come.

I had a simple plan to trap Schell, something that was based on a very simple fact. The one single thing all thieves have in common is their fear of being double crossed. No matter how long a thief has known or worked with another thief, he always has that fear in the back of his mind, and sometimes it's not so far back. My job now was to plant a big fat seed of mistrust in Schell's mind about Monk Saunders and Larry Coster and force it to grow fast until it became a certainty. I wasn't too worried about him suspecting me; the biggest thing in my favor there was that Monk saw me in a prison cell next to his three years ago—Schell would know about that. And now here I was in front of him, playing it dumb, but I had carried the attache case in to him.

I slanted my story carefully, working slowly towards the big pitch. Schell just sat there listening attentively, watching me through half-closed eyes. It began to look to me that it would have to be the big pitch, or nothing, because he didn't interrupt me once.

". . . so he said I should wait right there in my hotel room for him. Then he went out, he took the bag with him, and came back about forty minutes later. He told me to come on, we had to . . ."

Leon Schell's eyes narrowed to slits. "I was wondering why you took so long to get up here," he said. "Monk got to your hotel room almost two hours ago. You mean he left you there, took that bag out, and then came back?"

"Yeah, that's right. He said something about the locks being pretty good, but not good enough. Then when he came back he said we had to meet Larry . . ."

"Shut up," Schell barked.

There was a thin white line around his nostrils, his forehead was furrowed with lines. I could almost see him thinking of Monk

working over those locks. If Monk could open burglar-proof vaults, those locks on the attache case wouldn't be too tough for him, no matter how good they were.

"Monk wasn't supposed to open that bag," Schell said. He was thinking out loud now. "It was going out of the country. If he and that other crumb pulled anything on me . . ."

He was on his feet, the gun in his pocket forgotten as his right hand searched in the trouser pocket and came out with a long, slender key. He walked over and picked up the attache case and laid it on the radio, then slid the key into the first lock—it snapped open in a moment. Then he unlocked the other one and lifted open the top. He stood there for long seconds, his face draining of color the white line around his nose and mouth deepening. He picked up a handful of the stones, held them under the light, and for more long seconds studied them closely.

Leon Schell knew diamonds, he didn't need a loupe. And he knew glass stones, even good glass stones. He let out something that sounded like a groan and flung the whole handful against the far wall.

He stood still for almost a minute, not saying anything, his face working spasmodically. Then he started swearing in a low, deadly voice. He called Monk Saunders and Larry Coster every vile name I ever heard, and some I never heard before. His hands shook in his rage.

". . . those slobs couldn't get in that building even when they were open for business. I never should have cut them in. It was all my work, my work and planning, two whole years it took, and then I get this from pigs like them . . ."

I still hadn't figured out *why* Leon Schell had his two buddies and me carry the stuff for him today, why he hadn't been along, but I didn't think this was the time to ask. I wanted him to talk, and brother, he sure was. It was just beautiful. I sat there and listened and wondered how it would sound when it was played back in Court.

He went on and on, it was unbelievable. He had no restraint or caution. He seemed to be unaware that I was even in the room, even though he was looking right at me and talking right to me. He told me how he had set up the job, everything he did, how he had timed it, and how little Monk and Larry Coster had to do with the whole thing. I had come up here hoping he'd open the attache case with his key and that he would make a damning statement or two against himself, and here I had something far better than any confession. It was all over, all wrapped up now for keeps. I could hand him over to O'Leary now as one very dead duck. All I needed was five minutes or less to get to a phone and Leon Schell was

through. I only had to figure out a way to get away from him gracefully and that shouldn't be too hard.

He kept on talking, telling me how he had seen the infra-red ray light beams diagrammed and described in a trade electronics magazine, and how he had read about the television eye to protect the vault in a national industrial security magazine, and then how he planned to outwit these measures. He just wouldn't stop talking.

I began to feel like the farmer who prayed for rain and then had all his crops washed out in a cloudburst. I just wanted to get out and away from him now to call O'Leary, but there was no way I could think of to shut him up and make my break. He kept going for minutes more, but finally ran out of breath.

It gave me the break I wanted. I stood up and moved a couple of steps towards the foyer. He eyed me sharply and seemed to realize that I was in the room with him for the first time since he started his ranting.

"Guess I'm no use here, Leon," I said. "May as well mosey off. I'm real sorry for your trouble, though." I turned and headed for the door.

"Wait a minute." His voice was sharp and commanding.

I turned around and looked questioningly at him. He apparently didn't suspect anything yet, his hands were clenched together, not exactly wringing them, but almost. At least they weren't near his gun pocket.

"Wait a minute. I may need you for something. I've got to think of something."

He paced up and down on the rug in quick hurried strides, his face a mask of concentration. This was a fine note. Here I had the guy signed, sealed, and almost delivered, on my way out of the dump to call the cops, and he tells me to wait while he thinks of something. But I couldn't run out on him, now I really had to play it cool, very cool.

I shifted my weight and half faced him. I dug into my jacket and pulled out a pack of cigarettes and lit one and blew the smoke at the ceiling and watched it curl upward. My mind was racing. If he sent me out on some kind of an errand it would still be all right. All I had to do was get out of his sight and to a phone booth—in five minutes the building would be crawling with cops.

He kept pacing up and down, making sharp turns at the end of each little trip he made on the rug, his back never to me. The room was very quiet, the music coming from the hi-fi radio seemed louder and louder. I cursed myself for getting hog-tied like this, every minute was precious, but there wasn't a single thing I could do about it.

The music stopped on the radio, an annoying fifteen second com-

mercial came on, so annoying it made Leon Schell head for the set to snap it off, but a news announcer came on before he got there. The announcer's words smashed into the room like live devils, loud and clear as rifle shots. My blood froze, my insides felt as if an icy hand was ripping them out.

". . . police have identified the dead man as Martin Saunders, better known in the underworld as Monk Saunders. He is believed to be one of the suspects involved in an enormous jewel robbery last weekend which . . ."

Leon Schell's right hand darted into his pocket and came out with the little gun as soon as he heard Monk's name mentioned. Now it was aimed right at my head. His eyes glared into mine, beady marbles of hate. My heart felt like lead, slowly sinking into my legs, and for a crazy second I thought my eyes had changed into Coca Cola bottles.

". . . high police officials refused all comment, but reporters on the scene learned that the occupant of the hotel room was an operative for an insurance concern and that he was seen in the vicinity shortly before the body was found . . .

The announcer kept talking, but I couldn't hear the words, the blood was pounding in my head too loudly. Schell was slightly bent over the set, still glaring at me, not missing a word. Finally the announcer shut up and he snapped off the set.

"So you're an insurance copper, and you killed Monk," he snarled.

He was too far away from me to try anything, and he held that gun like it was on a tripod. I just swallowed hard and didn't say anything.

He threw his head back and gave an insane laugh, it was the weirdest thing I ever heard in my life. I could feel the cold sweat beading on my forehead, a chill raced down my back.

"That's real funny," he said. "An insurance copslob like you almost fooling Leon Schell, imagine that. But that was the last laugh, you'll be very dead in a minute or two, after you tell me why you came up here with that junk. Now *talk*, while you're still alive."

My mind was a chaos, I tried desperately to think of something, anything, to stall for time. For sure I didn't want to die, but if I lived, I didn't want him to get away.

"Sure, Leon, sure," I said. "Only if I were you I'd put that gun away and forget all about shooting people, especially me. You're hung up on the jewelry job, you've had it on that. There's no percentage in making it worse and signing your own death warrant by killing me and that's just what you'd be doing."

He was icy calm again, his face a hard mask of hatred.

"Why would I sign my death warrant?" he asked. "Seems to me I remember saying a few indiscreet

things to you a while back, things I never should have said. You don't think I'll let you walk out of here so you can tell people what I said, do you? You might even try to convict me for that jewel robbery. And I hate witnesses. A bullet in your head now and I never have to worry about you."

The way he looked, the hate in his eyes, I knew he meant it. It had never looked worse for me. I decided on a desperate gamble—it was all I could do.

"Look, Schell," I said, "I didn't come up here for a social call, you realize that. And I didn't come up here to hand you a suitcase full of glass. I came up here to get you to talk, and brother, you sure did, with bells. Only I have a microphone and a transmitter strapped to me, and every word you said was broadcast to a truck my boys have downstairs. And they have earphones on so they know what's going on up here and by now they've probably called Police Headquarters to send a few squad cars around. So now if you want to shoot, go ahead."

I knew from the flicker of doubt and confusion in his eyes I had scored heavily. Nobody commits a murder when the cops might walk in a couple of minutes later.

"Where's the mike and transmitter?" he asked. His gun still hadn't moved a fraction of an inch.

I half bent over and pulled the material of my trousers tautly over the bulge of the recorder strapped to my thigh. "Right here," I said.

"I don't mean like that. I want to see this great invention. Take your clothes off. Strip."

"What!" I was incredulous. I couldn't believe it.

"You hear me boy, get your clothes off fast, otherwise I take them off you, after I put a slug in you. Now!"

There was nothing I could do but obey. I started to unknot my tie.

"Just be very slow and easy with your hands, copper," he said. "If they move too fast I'll put a slug in your head. Now strip, right down to your skin."

I undressed slowly, careful not to make any abrupt moves with my hands.

"Fact is," he said, "I just don't believe anything you say. If you are telling the truth, it seems to me your cop friends should be here by now, and I don't hear anything. But if they are outside, I'd be foolish to try to make a break for it, if that's what you want me to do. If you're lying then you don't have a transmitter there and that's what I want to see, just what it is."

Leon Schell was no dummy. He almost had it figured out. I had slipped the control switch out of my jacket pocket and it was hanging down over my belt. I unhitched my belt and slipped out of my trousers. The recorder and the microphone were clearly visible now, held to

my legs with adhesive tape, the wire to the control hanging to the floor. I felt like a damn fool standing there in my underwear, socks, and shoes.

"Okay, boy, that's enough. Now just turn around and get your hands up high over your head," Schell ordered.

He came up behind me and I felt his hand on my left leg at the microphone, but didn't feel the gun in my back. He was a pro, all right. I couldn't move a muscle. He ripped the microphone off, then the recorder, tearing savagely at the tape. It felt like two fistsful of flesh came with them. I almost screamed with the pain. Then he backed away from me.

I turned around to look at him and lowered my hands without him telling me. He had dropped the microphone on the floor but had the recorder in his left hand and the gun still in his right. The recorder was half covered with adhesive tape, I knew he'd never get it off with one hand, and that meant he'd have to lay the gun down. An idea started ballooning in my mind.

My cigarette was still burning in an ash tray on a little end table next to a chair where I had placed it before I got undressed.

"Okay to smoke?" I asked him.

"Sure, relax," he said meanly. "It may be your last one."

He was eight or ten feet away from me, then moved a couple of feet further away to the bar and laid the gun on top of it. He didn't have to be an electronic wizard to figure out that the recorder wasn't a transmitter, and when he did tag it for what it was, I was dead six ways and up. This would be the only chance I'd have.

I reached toward the ash tray to flick my cigarette. It was made of heavy copper, just about the size of a baseball. This looked like my day for ash trays, but if that was all I could come up with, it would have to do. Now my life depended on it.

He was just starting to tear the adhesive tape off the recorder. I dropped my cigarette into the tray, seized it, and in one sweeping motion snapped it off right at his head.

He saw my first motion. His head came up, he hesitated for a split second, then his arm shot out for the gun. But his reflexes took over. The tray was whistling at his face like a meteor. He raised both arms to ward it off and tried to duck. It caught him on the side of his face and almost tore his ear off. He let out a shriek of pain.

I didn't wait. There was an overstuffed pillow on the chair and I scaled that at him, then took two jumps toward him and dove at him in a vicious tackle. His arm shot out frantically for the gun, but I smashed into him just as his fingers were inches from it and we both crashed to the floor. I dropped my head just as I hit him and rammed him full in the belly. It knocked the

wind out of him, but only for a second.

He twisted and turned under me and brought his knee up at my groin and I was just able to roll out of the way. I slammed my elbow into his gut and heard him grunt horribly as the air went out of him again. I rolled away and tried to scramble to my feet, but he came with me, his fingers groping for my eyes.

I smashed my right into his nose and the blood poured out but that didn't slow him up a bit. I tried to knee him but didn't get him right and he kept coming at me like an octupus, all arms and legs flailing. I reached a nerve center in his bull neck and squeezed hard. He screamed in pain and rolled away from me. I got to my knees and sprang up.

He didn't wait. He climbed up and jumped at me in one motion. His right slammed into my chest and it felt like a truck hit me. Then his left smashed into my face just under my right eye and for a second I thought I was going. I backed away from his deadly punches. With that thirty pounds he had on me I had to keep away from him. I kept peppering him with my left to slow him up, but he wouldn't slow. I threw a right at his chin that would have stopped any normal man—it landed perfectly but he just shook his head and kept coming. He landed another crusher over my heart, then another, and out of nowhere a fist slammed against my jaw. My head was spinning, I fought against passing out. All I could see was his bloodsoaked face and ear and an evil grin on his face.

Then he made the mistake he couldn't afford to make. A couple more shots like that and he'd have me on the floor, unconscious. But he was a gun man. The gun was still on top of the bar, four or five feet to his right. He stopped coming at me and took a step sideways towards the bar.

I shook my head desperately and jumped him. I landed two hard lefts on his face and a powerhouse right in his ribs. He gasped but tried to shift his weight and start in on me again, but I had all of that I wanted. He was just off balance enough to make himself awkward. I shot another right at his nose and more blood spurted, then smashed my open hand on his right shoulder in a Judo chop. It landed perfectly, his right arm fell dead like a tree. For the first time the evil grin disappeared and a look of alarm came on his face.

This was better, it evened up his thirty pound advantage. He was game, though, he wouldn't give up. He kept lashing out at me with his left, and kicking viciously at me whenever he thought he could reach me. Only now he couldn't.

From then on it wasn't really fair. I kept slamming his body with hard rights and jabbing his face

with my left. His useless arm kept him off balance—it was like slugging a punching bag. Only he wouldn't quit and he wouldn't go down.

I knew he'd go for the gun again if he got a chance. I circled him around so that his left side was against the side of the room where the bar was and backed away from him for a scond. He thought he could make it and tried. It was just what I wanted. I stepped in and threw a roundhouse right against his jaw with everything I had. His body sagged, then fell backward and this time it sounded like a tree when he hit the floor. He was out, but good.

I sucked air into my lungs, they felt as if they were on fire. I felt dizzy and wasn't sure that I wouldn't pass out. I moved groggily over to the bar and pushed the little gun back until it dropped behind it. I didn't want Schell jumping for that thing any more if he came to.

The recorder with its precious cartridge was lying on the rug in front of the bar, I bent down and picked it up and hugged it to me.

"That must be very valuable to you." It was a woman's voice.

I turned and saw her at the other end of the room. The bedroom door was open and she was standing just this side of it, with my gun in her hand, and it was pointed right at me. *Oh, no,* I thought wildly, *I can't lose this guy now, after everything that's happened today.*

She was big, and beautiful; a big, gorgeous blonde. Her voice sounded like the Gabor sisters with a sort of mittel Europe accent, but there was enough of her to make three Gabors. She had on a silk dressing gown which did nothing but show off what she had. Somehow she looked familiar, then I remembered. This must be the blonde who shanghied the helicopter pilot last weekend, the babe with the improbable name of Sandra LaCoeur. In a way I didn't blame that pilot.

She was looking at me with a smile playing around her lips, and I suddenly remembered I was in my underwear. Then I noticed with dismay quite a bit of it had come off in my go with Leon Schell.

"How do you do, Miss LaCoeur." I said dismally. "Sorry I had to mess your apartment up. You mind if I get dressed?"

"Please do," she said. "But don't try any of your tricks. You might not be as lucky with me. I grew up in Alsace during the war, and I killed three German soldiers before I was nine years old."

I knew from her eyes she was telling the truth. Besides, there were no more ash trays around and anyway I don't think I could throw a spitball across the room the way I felt. I walked over to my clothes and shoved the recorder cartridge into my jacket pocket, pulled on my trousers and tugged on my shirt. That cartridge had me crazy,

if I lost that now it would ruin me for life, if I lived.

"Just who are you, and what are you doing here?" she asked me.

That started a lot of wheels going around in my head. She was no dumb blonde, whatever else she was.

"Your boy friend and I had a little fight," I said. I was trying to get the pitch, to fit her into the picture.

"He's not my boy friend," she said. "Leon is just a friend, more a business associate I guess you would say."

That didn't figure, but the wheels started turning faster. Leon Schell never worked with a woman, that I was sure of. But he would hire one for a specific job, such as grounding that pilot for a weekend, and it was easy to see he wouldn't mind mixing a little pleasure with business, and with this Amazon that kind of mixing would be a real pleasure. I wanted to get that gun away from her in a hurry, so I gave her a fast pitch. With a dame like this there was one thing in the world that interested her more than anything else, dough.

"Look, honey," I said, "I'm working with the police. I don't know if you know it or not but your friend Schell here is one of the most wanted jewel thieves in the country. He's wanted so bad by just my company that they have a twenty-five thousand dollar reward out for him. You have a pretty fancy layout here, with that kind of dough you could pay some of the expenses for quite a while."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

Leon Schell moved his legs and let out a groan. This had to be fast. I put the pressure on.

"I want you to give me that gun right now, and I want you to testify about how Schell hired you for that job in Poughkeepsie last week. In a little while this place will have a couple dozen cops swarming over it, and somehow I can't imagine you having a gun fight with the police over any man, especially a guy who is just a business associate. If you work with me I know I can talk my company into giving you all or a good chunk of that reward money. But it has to be right now, before this guy wakes up. If you stick with him there'll be a mess when the cops get here, but no matter what happens, he's finished, and you won't get a smell of that dough."

She was a Frenchwoman with French logic, she could see a chance at some heavy money, and heaven be praised, she was a woman who could make up her mind quickly.

"Okay, handsome, I work for you," she said.

She lowered the gun and walked, no strutted, no I mean sidled toward me. Everything shook, but it shook just right. So help me, in a spot like that I was distracted. When she handed me the gun I just kept looking.

"I wasn't really going to shoot

you," she smiled at me. "You're really much too handsome. I thought maybe you were a burglar or something like that. I was asleep in my bedroom when I heard all that racket and . . ."

"It's okay, baby," I smiled back at her.

Leon Schell moaned again, but now I didn't care if he sang the *St. Louis Blues*.

"Where's your phone?" I asked her.

She went over to the sofa and pulled open the door of the end table at the far end. I found myself getting distracted again, but forced my mind back to business. For a big gal she sure had perfect control of her musculature. I sat down to face Schell. He was still out and now I hoped he'd stay that way for another ten minutes. Just to be sure, I kept my gun at the ready on him. Sandra LaCoeur sat on the couch a foot or so from me, looking at him. She even smelled nice.

I dialed the operator and asked her to get me Police Headquarters. This time I didn't get any jazz about dialing it myself, I heard a bunch of clicks and noises over the wire and then the cop operator at Headquarters came on.

"Drop the gun, Young. Fast."

I half turned my head towards the foyer and saw them—two, no three men, stepping quickly out of the kitchen into the foyer, spreading out. Each had a gun in his mitt. My heart leaped, then I recognized one of them, I think his name was Cosgrove, one of the Homicide Squad boys. I dropped the gun silently on the rug. The cop at Headquarters kept saying *hello* but I couldn't say anything. I looked at Sandra LaCoeur and she had a stricken look on her face.

"It's okay, baby," I said. "These guys are the cops I was telling you about." I had no idea how they got there that fast.

"Put the phone down, Young," one of them said. "You won't have to make any calls for a long, long time."

I put it down on the cop who was still saying *hello*. One of the detectives walked to the front door and opened it, then I got another surprise. Men poured through it, but the first one in was Inspector O'Leary himself. His face looked like red granite, his eyes were flashing fire and brimstone if I ever saw it. He looked mad enough to eat me alive if I so much as sneezed. He didn't say anything at first, his eyes swept over every detail in the room—at Leon Schell still out on the floor, the open attache case, the junk jewelry on the far side of the room where Schell threw it, the mess of the bar where Schell and I had crashed into it, over Sandra LaCoeur, and finally over me. They fastened on me like two gimlets. I realized I had my coat and tie off and Sandra LaCoeur was only a foot away from me on the couch—my face got very red.

"Little hootchie-cootchie on company time?" he finally asked.

One of the detectives let out a wolf whistle behind him.

Inspector O'Leary whirled around. "Shut up!" he bellowed.

He turned back to me. "Now will you mind telling me just what the hell is going on here?" he yelled at me.

"Sure, Inspector, sure," I told him.

"Shut up, wait a minute," he barked. "Perrozzi, get your pad out and take down every word he says."

"Yes sir," Perrozzi answered.

I told him the whole thing, from the time I left him earlier that afternoon right up to the end. I embroidered the end a little, exaggerating what Sandra LaCoeur had done to help me. Hell, I was willing to give her the whole insurance company for the way she bailed me out of that mess. Inspector O'Leary's face gradually relaxed as he listened. When I was finished he almost looked human again.

"Where's the recorder cartridge?" he asked me.

I got up and got it out of my coat. "It's all on that," I told him as I handed it to him. "Everything, from the time Monk came in to my room right up to the time Schell made me strip."

Sandra LaCoeur smiled and a couple of the detectives snickered. Inspector O'Leary took it in his giant paw and slipped it into his pocket. He was almost beaming at me.

"I hate to admit it lad," he said, "but you did a fine job, sure enough you did. I admit I was a little mad at you for a while, but you were lucky and it worked out just fine."

"Well, Inspector," I said, "I promised you I'd get the three of them for you, and that's what I tried to do, even if I had to cut a few corners. You know, like the old song goes, 'One, Two, Three, O'Leary'."

Inspector O'Leary threw back his head and roared with laughter. I didn't get it, I didn't think it was that funny, in fact now I couldn't see anything funny about it at all. But he was having the time of his life. Even the detectives looked puzzled.

When he was able to talk he called Perrozzi again. "Get handcuffs on Schell and get an ambulance up here for him—we don't want anything to happen to the lug now, and get a Matron up here so Miss what-ever-her-name-is can get dressed. Bring her in for questioning, we'll need her as a material witness. I'll take care of Young myself."

"Gee, thanks, Inspector," I said.

He swooped up my coat with one hand and me with the other. He put his right arm around my shoulder and I thought I was dancing with a bear. He headed me across to the foyer, up the little stairs, and out into the hall, then

rang for the elevator.

"What's so funny about 'One, Two, Three, O'Leary'?" I asked him when I could breathe again.

His eyes twinkled. "You wouldn't understand, lad," he said. "But it brings back the old days to me. When I was a rookie in Hell's Kitchen I never locked anybody up unless I had three charges against them, and I always made them stick. I got the nickname 'One, Two, Three, O'Leary' those many long years ago. It just struck me funny coming from you."

That didn't clear it up at all. "Why was it so funny coming from me?" I asked him.

"Well, lad, it's like this. When my men brought that other punk, Larry Coster in, I told him I'd personally unscrew his head from his shoulders unless he told me where this Schell guy was hiding. I figured you'd be up there with him. He came across fast enough, and on my way up here I guess I was pretty peeved at you. As a matter of fact when I got you I was going to book you on no less than sixteen different charges. But you did such a good job I'm going to forget all that now, I'll let bygones be bygones."

"You mean you won't book me?" I asked hopefully.

"Oh, I have to book you, lad, you know that. But I'll cut it down to three. Homicide, leaving the scene of a homicide, and failing to report a homicide." He roared with laughter again.

The elevator came and we stepped in. This guy had the lousiest sense of humor I had ever seen in my life. All I could say was "Um."

"Cheer up, lad," he guffawed. "I'll buy you a beer or two before I book you. No, I'll make it three. Three for 'One, Two, Three, O'Leary'."

I wondered if I could talk him into five or six so I could get to sleep and maybe dream of Sandra LaCoeur.

MANHUNT

Subscribe Today

MONEY-SAVING RATES

First Subscription . . . . . (12 Issues) $4.00, (24 Issues) $7.50
Two Subscriptions . . . . . (12 Issues) $7.50, (24 Issues) $14.00
Each additional . . . . . 12 Issues Subscription, $3.00; 24 Issues, $6.00

Add $1.00 for subscriptions mailed outside the United States

• •

Mail this order form with your check or money order made out to:
Flying Eagle Publications, 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y.

Send MANHUNT regularly for { ☐ 24 Issues / ☐ 12 Issues } 2/61 (Check which)

TO . . . . . .

Address . . . . . .

. . . . . .

• •

Mail this order form with your check or money order made out to:
Flying Eagle Publications, 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y.

Send MANHUNT regularly for { ☐ 24 Issues / ☐ 12 Issues } 2/61 (Check which)

TO . . . . . .

Address . . . . . .

. . . . . .

JAZZ'60 A REVIEW BY NAT HENTOFF WILDCAT CHORUS CALL A WORD-PICTURE STORY OF THE BIRTH OF A BROADWAY MUSICAL 3 BEAUTIFUL GIRLS: BETTY, THE UNTYPICAL BEATNIC; CHRIS, A FILLY FROM DENMARK; DONNA, MISS ARKANSAS REVEALED FASHION THE NEW LOOK IN RUGGED MALE APPAREL PLUS: CARTOONS JOKES FICTION ALL IN THE DECEMBER **NUGGET** ON YOUR NEWSSTANDS TODAY!

MANHUNT

FEBRUARY, 1961